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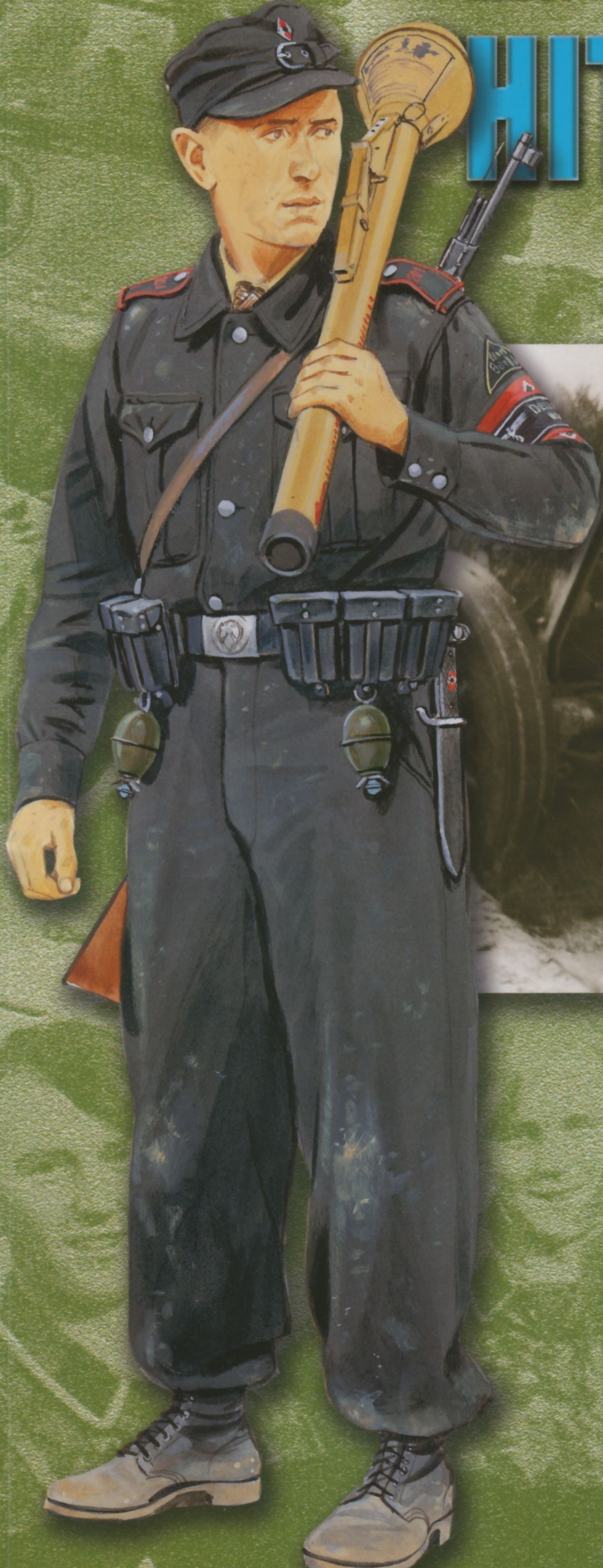
HITLERJUGEND'

1933-1945

Tom Cockle & Ronald Volstad



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'HITLERJUGEND'

1933-1945

Text By Tom Cockle
Color Plates by Ronald Volstad

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Introduction

Hitler Youth – The Early Years

In 1921, 17 year-old Gustav Lenk applied for membership in Adolf Hitler's new Nazi Party. Told he was not old enough, it was suggested that he form a youth group within the Party. The following spring, an invitation to join the new youth group appeared in the Völkischer Beobachter, the Nazi Party newspaper. A public meeting was arranged at the Bürgerbräu Keller, a large beer hall in Munich that would become famous in 1923 for the 'Putsch', where Hitler would officially announce the formation of the German Youth League. The response was disappointing as only 17 youths showed up.

Undaunted, Lenk continued to organize the German Youth League into two sections, one for 14 to 16 year-olds and another for 16 to 18 year-old boys. There was plenty of competition for the new group among the youth of Germany. Several other youth movements already existed in Germany, including the Wandervögel, founded in 1896, and the Pathfinder Boy Scouts founded in 1908 which stressed the benefits of outdoor living. However, Lenk persisted and by 1923, several units had been established not only in Germany, but also in Czechoslovakia and Austria as well, now known as the Jungsturm Adolf Hitler.

After the failed Munich Putsch in November 1923, Hitler was tried and sentenced to prison in April 1924 and the Nazi Party and Youth League outlawed. Efforts to continue the youth movement under different names resulted in Lenk being imprisoned with Hitler in Landsberg.

Upon his release from prison, Hitler set about rebuilding the Nazi Party intent on using political means to obtain his goals. The Youth League was also revived as the Greater German Youth Movement, but with a new leader. Gustav Lenk had fallen into disfavor with the Nazi hierarchy and was replaced by Kurt Gruber who had been a member of the Nazi Party since 1923. On 4 July 1926, the name of the movement was officially changed to 'Hitler Jugend' with Gruber as its first Reichsführer. Under his guidance, the movement flourished growing tenfold between 1927 and 1928 and another 30 percent from 1928 to 1929. Another reorganization took place that saw a new group for 6 to 10 year-old boys formed. The Jungvolk was created for boys 10 to 14 years old preparing them for passage into the Hitler Jugend for boys from 14 to 18 years old. New uniforms, based on that worn by the Sturmabteilung, or SA, were introduced. It consisted of a brown shirt and black shorts with an armband featuring the swastika on a red band with a white stripe.

In spite of all he accomplished, Gruber's time was at hand and Hitler replaced him with the aristocratic Baldur von Schirach in the newly created post of Reichsjugendführer, in October 1931. The movement was organized along military lines with a hierarchy of ranks and competition was strongly encouraged where winning and success were all that mattered. The organization was mobilized to campaign for Hitler and the Nazi Party during the elections of 1932. The previous years of training served them well as they carried the political battle into the streets with frequent and bloody confrontations with their political opponents.

In the spring of 1932, the Nazi Party received 37 percent of the vote and in July, doubled their seats to become the largest political party in Germany. On 30 January 1933, the ailing President Paul von Hindenburg made Hitler Chancellor of Germany.

After their political success, von Schirach set about bringing all German youth movements under the banner of the Hitler Jugend. About 400 other youth groups existed in Germany with approximately six million members. These groups were placed under von Schirach's control and soon, the communist, Jewish and Catholic groups were disbanded while the Protestant groups chose to integrate. Membership rose from a total of 107,000 in 1932 to 2,300,000 in 1933 and stood at 7,300,000 in 1939.

A further restructuring occurred that placed boys in the Jungvolk from age 10 to 14. After a rigorous training program, the boys of the Jungvolk were required to correctly answer questions on Nazi racial, political doctrine and ideology and demonstrate their athletic ability and courage. At this time they were entitled to wear the uniform, including the Hitler Youth dagger which was inscribed with the words 'Blut und Ehre' meaning 'Blood and Honor'. They then moved up into the Hitler Jugend at age 14 and stayed there until they were 18. Girls were also now included in the movement as the Bund Deutscher Mädel, or League of German Girls, intended to prepare them for domestic life and motherhood.

During this time, the Hitler Jugend were involved in a number of peaceful duties including working on farms under the Landdienst program where they were required to work from spring until the fall harvest. By 1935, there were some 200,000 youths employed in this fashion. They also learned trades, worked on roads and planted trees and flowers in the national parks.

Paramilitary training was introduced in 1937 under the guidance of the three armed services. The Flieger-Hitlerjugend provided boys with an interest in flying a chance to visit Luftwaffe airfields and offered the opportunity of flying as passengers in fighters and bombers. As early as 1934, boys of the Hitler Jugend were allowed to participate in building and flying model gliders. When the Nationalsozielistiche Flieger Korps (NSFK) was formed in 1937, boys over the age of 18 received instruction in gliding and flying and membership soon rose to 78,000.

Boys with an interest in boating joined the Marine-Hitlerjugend where they were taught sailing and navigation. Their ranks swelled to almost 62,000 members.

The Motor-Hitlerjugend trained boys in motor mechanics and taught them how to drive motor vehicles and motorcycles, skills that would later be put to good use by the Wehrmacht. By 1938, 28,000 boys had earned their driver's licenses.

Smaller units provided training in radio signals, anti-aircraft and air raid operations and field medicine. Training was also provided in the use of small arms, particularly with the rifle and by 1938, approximately 75 percent of the 1,200,000 Hitlerjugend boys using the ranges were qualified as marksmen.

Hitlerjugend at War

Shortly after the beginning of hostilities, weapons training for the Hitler Jugend increased. To aid in the war effort, Jungvolk conducted scrap drives collecting brass, copper, metal, paper and bottles and were also used to carry messages.

In 1940, von Schirach resigned as head of the Hitler Youth and was replaced as Reichsjugendführer by Artur Axmann who had a long history with the organization and had formed the first Hitler Youth group in Wesphalia in 1928. He had been in action during the battle for France before his appointment in August 1940, but before he could take over, he was sent to Russia where he was severely wounded in 1941, losing an arm.

In March 1942, special camps (Wehrertüchtigungslager) were set up to provide a three week intensive infantry training course for boys from 15 to 18 years old. Ultimately, 226 camps were set up. Both the Wehrmacht and the SS were interested the camps as a source of new recruits, although the SS saw them in terms of their political indoctrination as ideal political soldiers. As the war progressed, beginning in 1943 Hitler Jugend aged 15 and over were also assigned to anti-aircraft gun batteries as Flakhelfer. Though originally intended to man batteries close to their homes, many ended up being transferred where they were needed most all over Germany.

As the fortunes of war turned against Germany in 1944, it was suggested that a force consisting of boys not yet old enough for military service be formed. Potentially, there were 62,000 boys available for service from the Labor Service, 160,000 17 year-old boys who had completed military training and another 25,000 in the Luftwaffe and Kriegsmarine. On 25 September 1944 Hitler approved the formation of the Volkssturm, or People's Army to be manned by boys as young as 16 to men as old as 60 along with soldiers on convalescent leave. In practice, their numbers did not exceed 60,000.

In late March 1945, Reichsjugendführer Artur Axmann announced the formation of special tank hunter teams of Hitler Jugend trained in the use of the Panzerfaust and in constructing tank traps. Each troop was to consist of nine boys, six armed with Panzerfausts and three to provide covering fire with machine guns. About 2000 were employed east of Berlin against the Russians in a short-lived effort that resulted in their complete annihilation by 20 April 1945.

During the last days of the Reich, the Nazi propaganda machine created the impression that bands of Werewolf guerrillas were being trained to carry on after the cessation of hostilities, killing Allied troops and German collaborators. In fact they were only trained in the sabotage and disruption of traffic and poisoning water and food supplies. Although their activity was not widespread, there were several occurrences where extremely young boys sacrificed themselves in a vain attempt to stem the Allied advance and where many chose suicide over surrender.

After the war, former Reichsjugendführer Baldur von Schirach was tried and sentenced on 1 October 1946 to twenty-years imprisonment for 'crimes against humanity' for his role in creating the Hitler Jugend. Artur Axmann escaped from Berlin and was not arrested until caught forming an underground Nazi cell in December 1945. In 1949, he was sentenced to 39 months imprisonment as a 'major offender'.

12.SS-Panzer-Division 'Hitlerjugend' 1943-1945

It is generally accepted that the idea to form a Waffen-SS division with 17 year old boys from the Hitler Jugend came from Reichsjugendführer Artur Axmann, however it is more likely the idea came from SS-Gruppenführer Gottlob Berger, who was chief of the Waffen-SS Recruiting Office, in early February 1943. Berger also suggested to his boss, Reichsführer-SS Heinrich Himmler, he should be appointed the division's new commander, but this request was denied due to his already important role in the SS.

Originally, the division was to be established on 1 June 1943 and recruiting began in the spring of that year. Formal establishment did not occur however until 24 June 1943 when it was designated SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Division 'Hitlerjugend'. By the end of the summer, 10,000 boys from the Hitler Jugend and Landdienst had been gathered at a military training camp located at Beverlo in Belgium to begin training.

Despite the heavy casualties suffered in Russia, it was decided that the new commander and cadre for the division would be provided by 1.SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Division 'Leibstandarte Adolf Hitler'. The new division commander would be SS-Oberführer Fritz Witt, at that time the commander of SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 1 and one of the original 120 members of the Liebstandarte. A highly decorated soldier, Witt had been awarded the Knights Cross on 4 September 1940 as an SS-Sturmbannführer and commander of I./SS-Regiment 'Deutschland' in the French campaign and subsequently, Oak Leaves to the Knights Cross on 1 March 1943. He was promoted to the rank of SS-Oberführer on 1 July 1943 and when promoted to SS-Brigadeführer und Generalmajor der Waffen-SS on 31 January 1944, at age 35 he became the second youngest general in the German armed forces.

Also assigned to the division were a number of other capable officers from 'LSSAH'.

SS-Standartenführer Kurt Meyer was assigned as commander of SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 25. Meyer had a reputation as a tough and ruthless officer who pushed himself and his men to their limit. He had earned the nickname 'Panzermeyer' after falling from the roof of a building while in training himself before the war, apparently unhurt. Another highly decorated soldier, he was awarded the Knights Cross on 18 May 1941 and the Oak Leaves to the Knights Cross on 23 May 1943.

SS-Obersturmbannführer Wilhelm Mohnke, also one of the original members of the Liebstandarte, was given command of SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 26. He was a harsh and brutal man, not well liked by his fellow officers or his men. During the Greek campaign, he had been severely wounded, losing a foot, which may have contributed to his demeanor.

Commanding SS-Panzer-Regiment 12 was SS-Obersturmbannführer Max Wünsche, a former Hitler Jugend member who joined the SS in July 1933. He too had been awarded the Knights Cross on 28 February 1943 as CO of I.SS-Panzer-Regiment 1.

In the following months, the individual regiments that would make up the division were formed. Among the last to be formed was the Panzer regiment on 3 November. Weapons and equipment, especially tanks, were in short supply. A shortage of uniforms required some of the boys to train in their Hitler Jugend uniforms or in civilian clothes. The artillery regiment had only a few howitzers and the Panzer regiment had only four Panzer IV's and three old Panzer III's that were available. Another ten Panzer IV's were received by the end of November. Ammunition, gasoline, trucks and half-tracks were also in short supply. On 30 October, the division was officially reorganized as a full Panzer division and was redesignated as 12.SS-Panzer-Division 'Hitlerjugend'. In December 1943 and January 1944, a number of captured Italian trucks were received but were prone to breakdowns making them useless.

By January 1944, the division had received forty Panzer IV's, most of its artillery, anti-tank and machine guns along with substantial number of trucks, half-tracks and motorcycles. In March 1944, the division conducted a training exercise with Panthers from I./SS-Panzer-Regiment 12, Panzer IV's from II./SS-Panzer-Regiment 12 and grenadiers from SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 26. The exercise was observed by Generalfeldmarschall Gerd von Rundstedt, Commander-in-Chief West and SS-Obergruppenführer Sepp Dietrich, commander of 1.SS-Panzer-Korps 'Leibstandarte Adolf Hitler' and earned praise for their high state of preparedness. Despite critical shortages, by early April the division was considered to be ready for action.

In the spring of 1944, 12.SS-Panzer-Division 'Hitlerjugend' was transferred to France to relieve 10.SS-Panzer-Division 'Frundsberg' for duties on the Eastern Front. On 1 April 1944 the first trains transporting the men and their equipment headed toward Normandy and their appointment with destiny. Although Generalfeldmarschall Erwin Rommel was convinced that the invasion would take place in Normandy, he could not convince OKW to have Panzer divisions transferred to the area. Consequently, they were held in a mobile reserve located inland from the beaches.

Shortly after midnight on 6 June 1944, Allied paratroops were dropped over Normandy beginning the long awaited invasion of the continent. In the confusion that followed, it took the German High Command several hours to fully appreciate that this was, in fact, the real invasion. Around 5:00 a.m. in the morning, von Rundstedt decided on his own to place 12.SS-Panzer-Division under control of Rommel's Army Group B and move it to the Bernay–Lisieux–Vimoutiers area. Around 7:00 a.m., the division staff received their march orders. Shortly after, Rommel's headquarters was notified that OKW had countermanded the order but did approve the move to the Lisieux area. It was not until early in the afternoon that OKW finally released the 12.SS-Panzer and the Panzer-Lehr for deployment to the invasion front.

Allied air superiority hampered all movement on the ground and by the time they reached Lisieux, they had already suffered 83 casualties. During the evening, elements of the division continued to proceed to the front. First to arrive was SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 25 under Kurt Meyer along with some ninety Panzer IV's from II./SS-Panzer-Regiment 12. Early on the morning of 7 June, they reached the western outskirts of Caen, where, fighting alongside 21.Panzer-Division blunted the Canadian advance at Buron and Authie, denying them the capture of the large airfield at Carpiquet. By now, the strength of the Allied forces had built up to the point that an attack aimed between Tilley and Bayeux on 8 June failed.

It was at this time that several Canadian prisoners were murdered at the Ardenne Abbey, a crime for which Kurt Meyer would stand trial in Canada after the war. There were many other documented cases of the killing of prisoners but it has never been satisfactorily established that these atrocities were officially sanctioned or merely the results of battle stress on the untried young soldiers.

On 14 June, a British naval barrage aimed at the division's headquarters southwest of Caen, killed the division commander, Fritz Witt. Kurt Meyer took over command the next day becoming, at age 33, the youngest division commander in the German armed forces.

Over the next three weeks, the division fought many battles in and around Caen until they were finally pushed out on 9 July. Two days later, the decimated division was withdrawn to the Potigny area to rest and refit, having suffered almost 60% casualties and losing almost half its tanks and half-tracks. On 18 July, they were thrown back into the lines when the British VIII Corps launched Operation 'Goodwood'. Meanwhile, away to the west Operation 'Cobra' was launched on 25 July by General Bradley's First Army, with the intent of splitting the German defenses in Brittany and driving south into central France.

During the evening of 7 August, Operation 'Totalize' was launched from Caen in the direction of Falaise. The remnants of the 12.SS-Panzer-Division managed to hold off the attackers and even launched their own counterattack, retaking Cintheaux in the process. The Canadians promptly struck back and pushed the division out of Cintheaux. With only 500 men remaining in his command, Kurt Meyer was forced to give up Falaise on 16 August.

Having successfully broken through the German lines near St. Lô, General Patton's Third U.S. Army continued to sweep east toward the Seine threatening to encircle the 19 German divisions facing the British and Canadian forces south and west of Falaise. By the time the Americans reached Argentan, only 20 miles separated the northern and southern pincers. On the night of 19 August, the pocket was closed at Chambois. Survivors of the 12.SS-Panzer-Division continued to slip through to safety but not before many were killed and hundreds captured.

What was left of this once powerful SS division, about 600 men without most of their equipment, was sent to Kaiserlautern where the training and replacement battalion was established. Following this they fought a series of rear guard actions as they withdrew from France toward the Belgian border and by the middle of September, were back in Germany to rest and refit. On 6 September, Kurt Meyer, wearing the uniform of a Wehrmacht Oberst, was captured near Amiens and command of the division passed temporarily to the chief of staff, SS-Sturmbannführer Hubert Meyer. On 15 November, SS-Standartenführer Hugo Kraas, from 1.SS-Panzer-Division LSSAH was appointed to command what was left of the division.

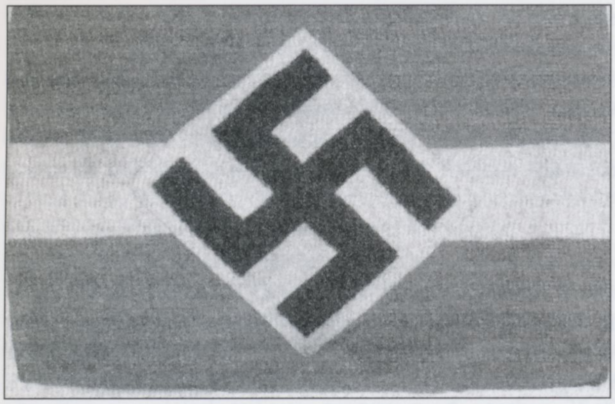
On 16 December, the division took part in the Ardennes Offensive as part of Sepp Dietrich's 6.Panzer-Armee. Kampfgruppe Müller, from SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 25 and 277.Volks-Grenadier-Division launched their attack against the twin villages of Krinkelt and Rocherath, supported by the Panthers from I./SS-Panzer-Regiment 12, part of Kampfgruppe Kühlmann. They had expected to capture the villages on the first day but ran into stiff resistance, and by the evening of 18 December, the villages were still in American hands. What remained of I./SS-Panzer-Regiment 12 was then pulled back and redeployed to support the attack on Büllingen and Dom Butgenbach by 12.Volks-Grenadier-Division and the rest of Kampfgruppe Kühlmann. For three days the combined group tried to push through the American lines between the two towns but after one last failed attempt by the Brümmbars of Sturmpanzer-Abteilung 217, they were beaten back by American artillery and tank destroyers.

Late December found the division in the V.Panzer-Armee sector forming part of the German encirclement around Bastogne. However, on 26 December, the 4th Armored Division pushed its way through Assenois and linked up with the defenders in Bastogne. The blockade had been broken and by 18 January 1945, the German army had withdrawn to the positions it held prior to the beginning of the offensive.

Hitler's attention now turned to the east where the situation was growing more critical by the day. On 20 January 1945, 6.Panzer-Armee was transferred to Hungary. In early February, 1.SS-Panzer and 12.SS-Panzer-Divisions successfully attacked the Soviet bridgehead that had been established over the Gran River. In March, the division took part in the offensive north of Lake Balaton with the objective of recapturing Budapest. Fighting against heavy Russian resistance and the spring thaw, the offensive ground to a halt.

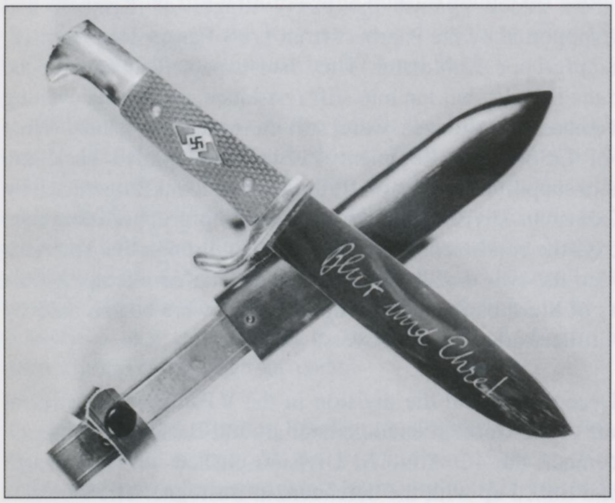
The German Army was being driven back now all along the Eastern Front. Fearful of Russian captivity, the division conducted a forced march to the west and the Americans. On 8 May 1945, the remnants of the division, 455 men and one tank, crossed the demarcation line at the River Enns in Austria and surrendered to the U.S. Seventh Army.

Hitler Jugend 1930-1945

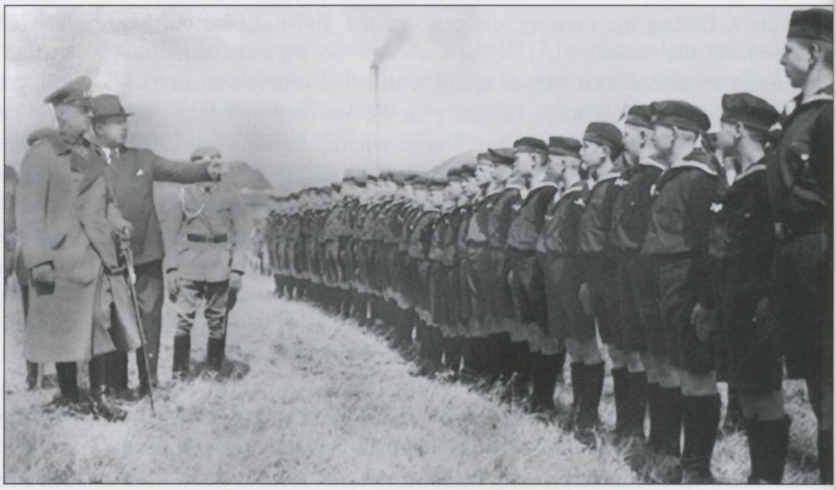


In the late 1920's, the leader of the Greater German Youth Movement, Kurt Gruber introduced now familiar Hitler Jugend armband and standard consisting of a red background with a black Nazi swastika on a white diamond and horizontal white stripe. On 4 July 1930, the name of the movement was officially changed to Hitler Jugend with Gruber appointed to be the first Reichsführer. In October 1931, Hitler replaced him with Baldur von Schirach.

Boys of the Deutsche Jungvolk raise a Nazi salute at the Nuremburg rally in 1934. The Hitler Jugend encompassed all German youth movements and the Deutsche Jungvolk was made up of boys between the ages of 10 and 14. Their banner was emblazoned with a white Sigrune on a black background.

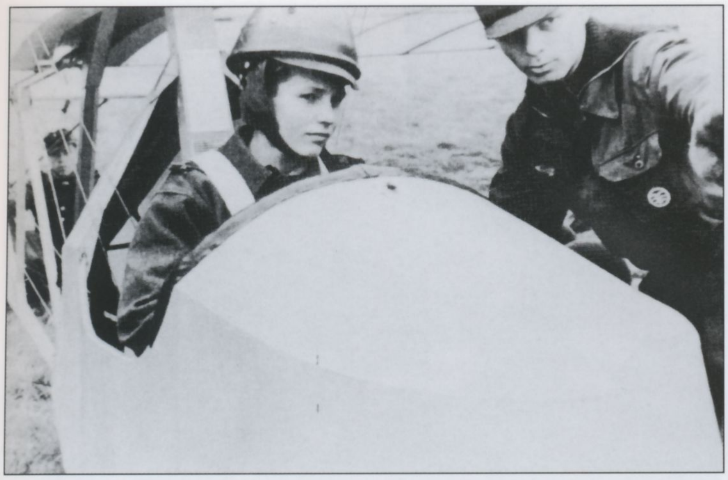


The ceremonial dagger of the Hitler Jugend inscribed with the words 'Blut und Ehre!' (Blood and Honor) which would become the motto of the future 12.SS-Panzer-Division 'Hitlerjugend'. Successful completion of an early training program, which included the teaching of Nazi political doctrine and physical fitness, entitled a 10-year old boy in the Deutsche Jungvolk (German Youth Organization) to wear the uniform which included the dagger along with the brown shirt and leather belt.

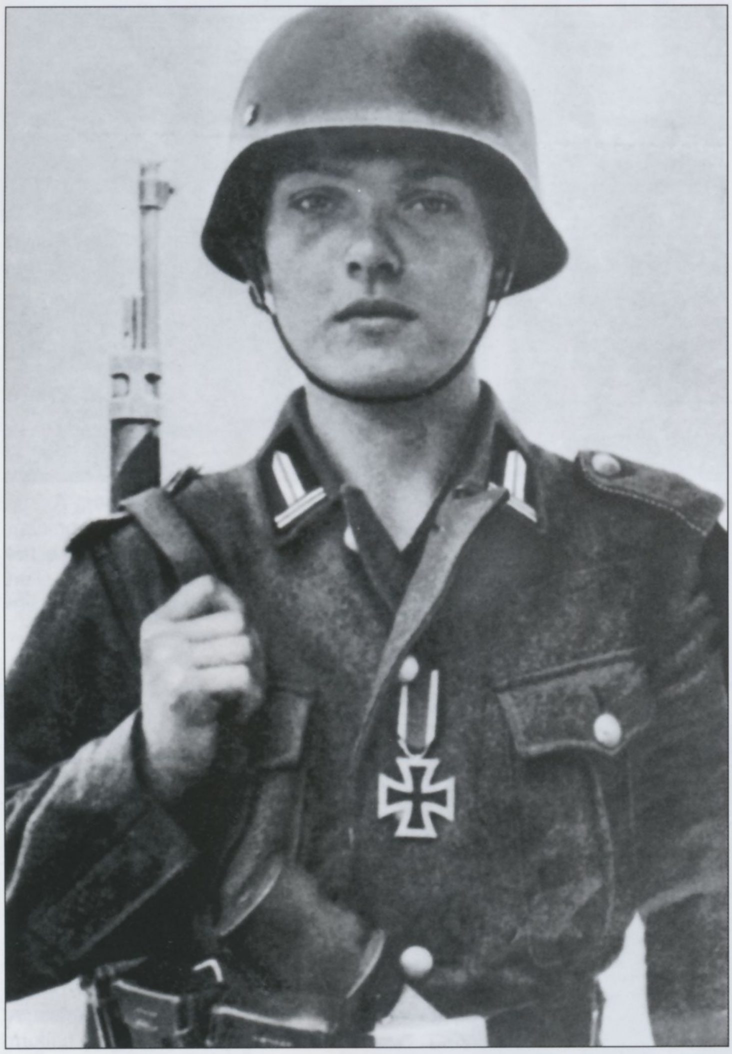


General Gerd von Rundstedt inspects a group of Marine-Hitlerjugend in northern Germany before the war. Boys in the Marine Hitler Youth received training in sailing and navigation in preparation for possible recruitment into the German navy, although this did not ensure their choice. Often, they were sent to other services where the need was greater.

The Landdienst (Land Service) was a 'back-to-the-land' program introduced in 1934 that promoted German youth working on farms from the spring until the fall harvest. Here, a group of Deutsche Jungvolk and a member of the Marine-Hitlerjugend receive their assignments. The Deutsche Jungvolk winter uniform consisted simply of a black jacket worn over the brown shirt and long trousers were often worn instead of the short pants. The Marine-Hitlerjugend member wears the Hitler Jugend red armband with a white stripe and black swastika reserved for boys in the 14-18 age group.



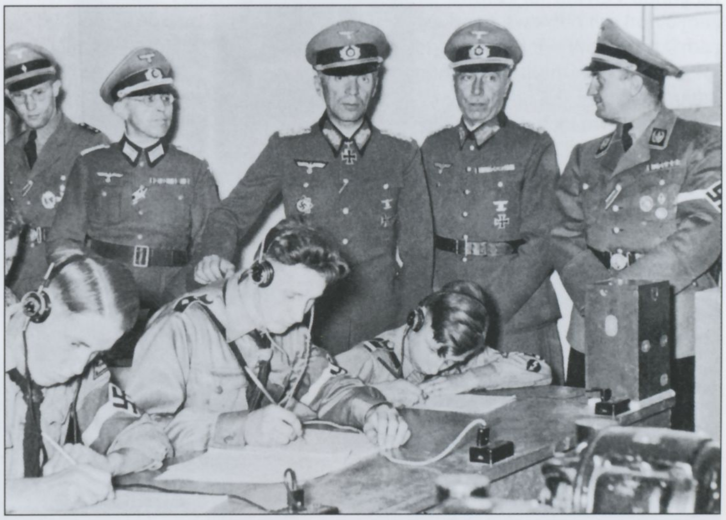
A member of the Flieger-Hitlerjugend prepares for his first solo flight in a glider under the guidance of his Deutsche Luftsports Verband instructor. The DLV, formed by Hermann Göring in 1933, was the predecessor of the Nationialsozialistische Flieger Korps, which trained the boys in all aspects of aviation. The instructor is wearing the Glider Pilot 'C' Level Proficiency Badge on his left breast, the highest level attainable.



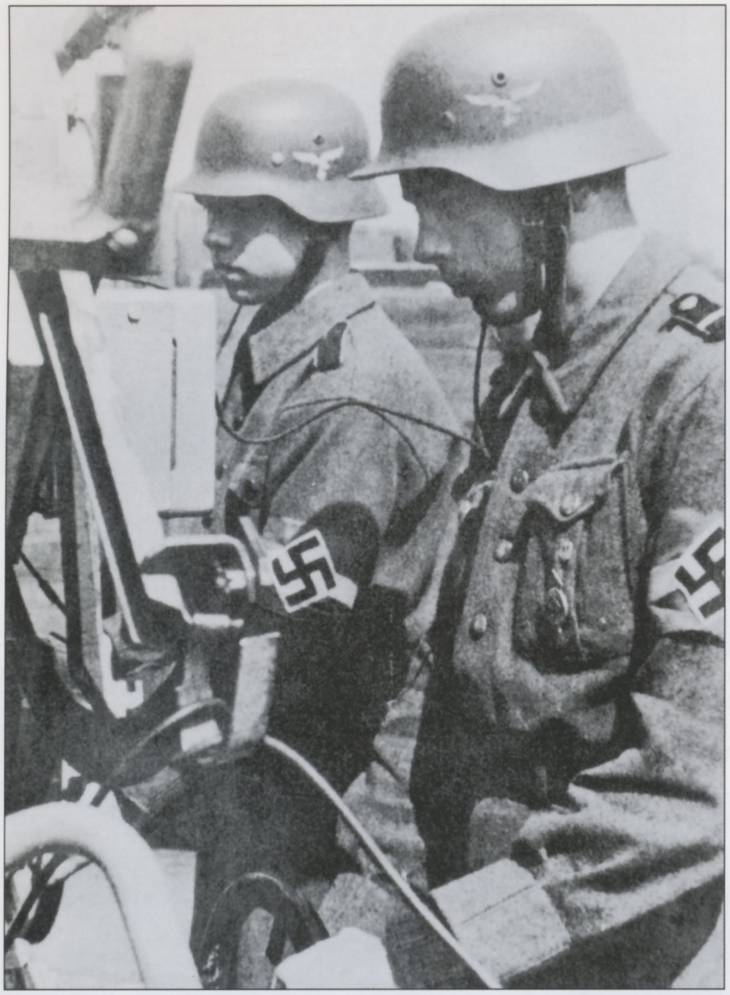
This youthful member of the Reichsarbeitsdienst (German Volunteer Labor Service) displays his newly won Iron Cross Second Class. His shoulder straps, light brown with a black and silver twist cord, indicate he has the rank of RAD-Arbeitsmann and has volunteered for at least one year's service. His 1940 pattern collar patch is white on a black background with a light gray stripe between the two vertical bars.

A group of Hitler Jugend Kavallerie in northern Germany. Boys in the Hitler Jugend Kavallerie were trained by regular cavalry instructors in riding and the care of horses. Their early style caps indicate the photo may have been taken in the mid-1930's.

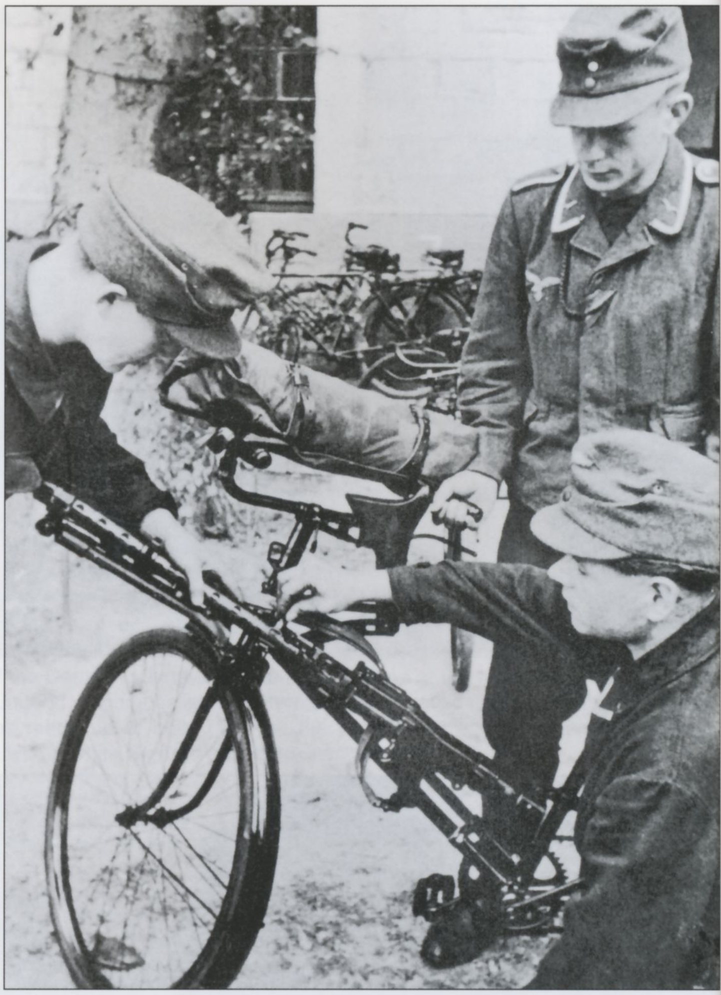
Almost 15,000 Hitler Jugend were called up into the Waffen-SS in 1940. The OKW, desperate for new recruits, responded by placing officers in the Hitler Jugend training courses to try and attract new men for the Wehrmacht. In the end, the SS won out because they were more adept at using illegal recruiting tactics.



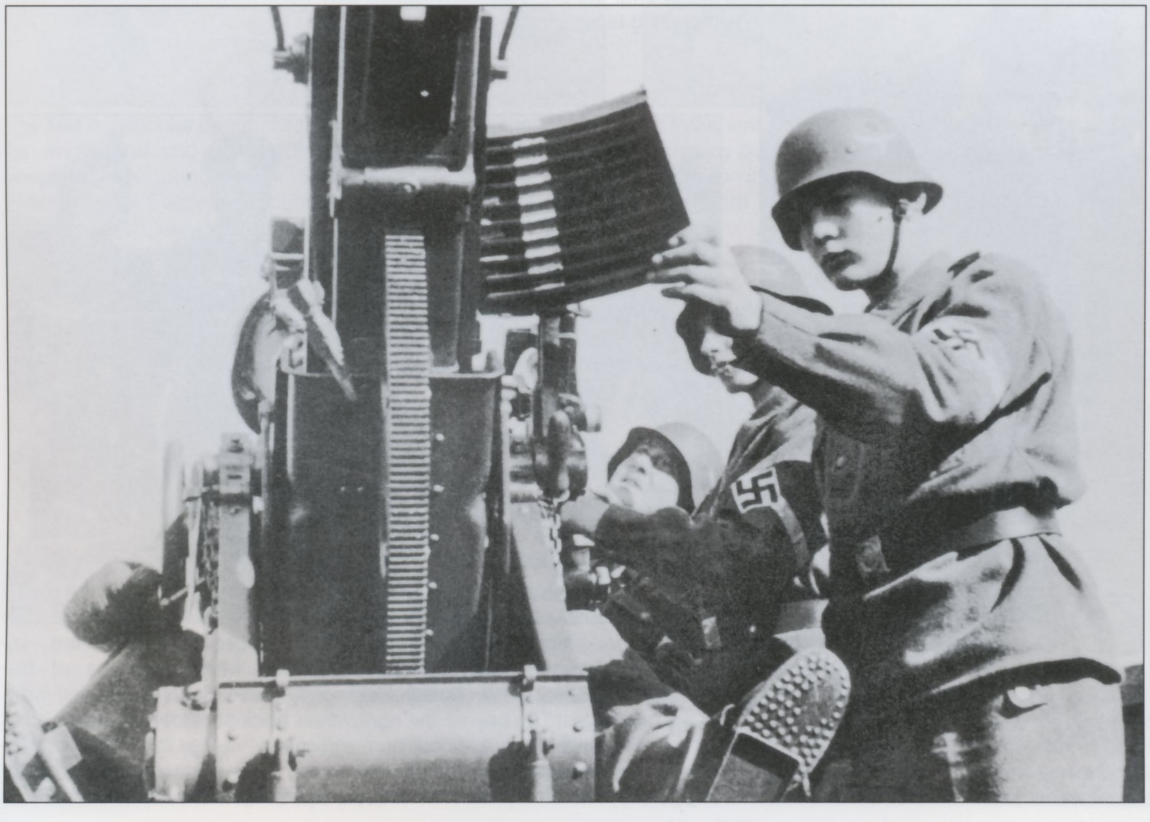
Several high ranking Wehrmacht officers accompanied by Reichsjugendführer Artur Axmann, look on while members of the Nachrichten-Hitlerjugend (signals-HJ) monitor radio signal traffic and write down messages. The boy on the right wears black shoulder straps piped in yellow with two silver braided bars indicating he has the rank of HJ-Oberrottenführer and also wears the Hitler Jugend Nachrichtenpersonal badge in yellow on a green oval with yellow piping on his left forearm.



Starting on 26 January 1943, members of the Hitler Jugend who were over 15 years old were assigned as HJ-Flakhelfer on many of the anti-aircraft batteries protecting German cities from Allied bombing. Here, two HJ-Flakhelfer help man an 8.8cm FlaK 18 or 36/37 anti-aircraft gun. The closest boy is wearing the metal Hitler Jugend Proficiency Badge awarded to members of the Deutsche Jungvolk on his left tunic pocket.



Hitler Jugend Flakhelferen secure an MG34 to the frame of a bicycle as a veteran Luftwaffe Unteroffizier looks on. By the winter of 1943-44, they began to be issued the standard Luftwaffe Fliegermütze.

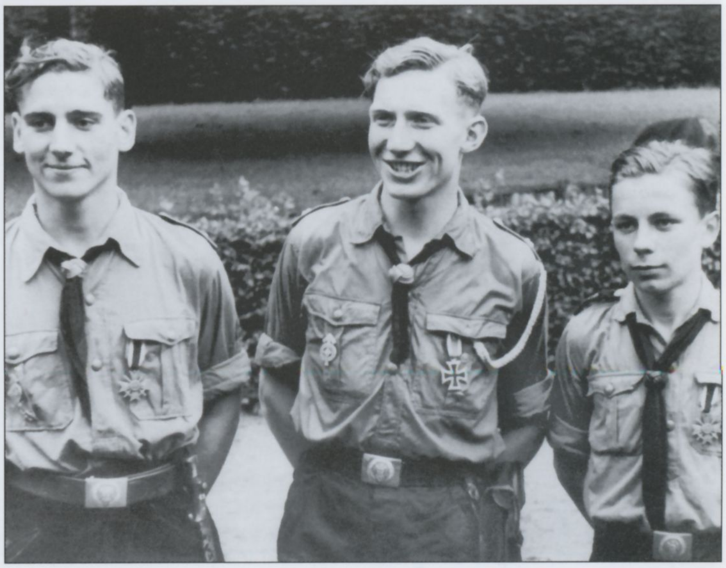


Two Hitler Jugend Flakhelferen help man a 2cm FlaK38 anti-aircraft gun. The HJ-Flakhelfer originally wore their normal uniform but in 1943, they began to be issued with a special blue-gray uniform consisting of a pullover blouse and matching trousers with a blue-gray version of the Hitler Jugend winter cap. The boy on the right is wearing his blouse outside of his trousers.

Wehrmacht veterans instruct members of the Hitler Jugend in marksmanship at a rifle range in a Hitler Jugend training camp in August 1943. The rifle is the standard 7.62mm Mauser Kar 98K. The highest level of marksmanship was considered to be 90 percent accuracy hitting the target at 50m distance with half the shots made in the prone position. In 1939 alone, approximately 51,000 Hitler Jugend earned the marksmanship award.

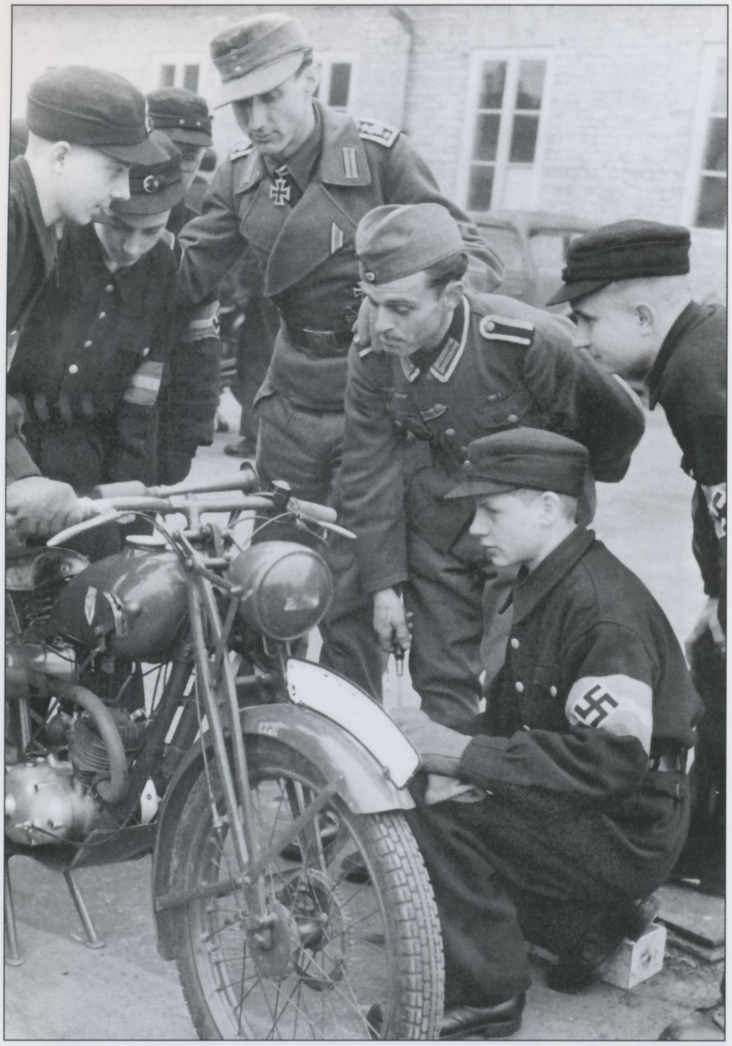
NCO's from the Panzer-Grenadier-Division 'Großdeutschland' instruct members of the Hitler Jugend in marksmanship while a Hitler Jugend officer watches, 28 December 1943. The boys are all wearing the winter uniform consisting of a black jacket worn over the brown shirt and long trousers. This type of training continued to the end of the war, providing the Volkssturm with a substantial number of recruits.

A group of Waffen-SS and Hitler Jugend instructors at a Hitler Jugend training camp during the winter of 1943-44. The SS-Unterscharführer on the left is wearing the Latvian red and white shield on his right sleeve indicating he is a member of the Lettische SS-Freiwilligen-Division which was renamed the 15.Waffen-Grenadier-Division der SS (lettische Nr.1) in June 1944.

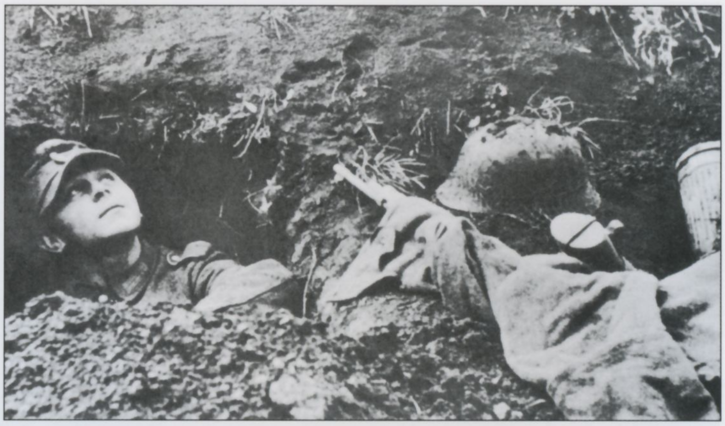


Three Hitler Jugend proudly display their awards for bravery during an air raid on Hamburg. The boy in the center has been awarded the Iron Cross Second Class. The other two boys have been awarded the War Merit Cross with Swords which was given for military merit other than in battle and for bravery other than in the front line. The two boys on the left also display the Hitler Jugend Proficiency Badge on their right shirt pocket and all are wearing the Hitler Jugend other ranks belt buckle.

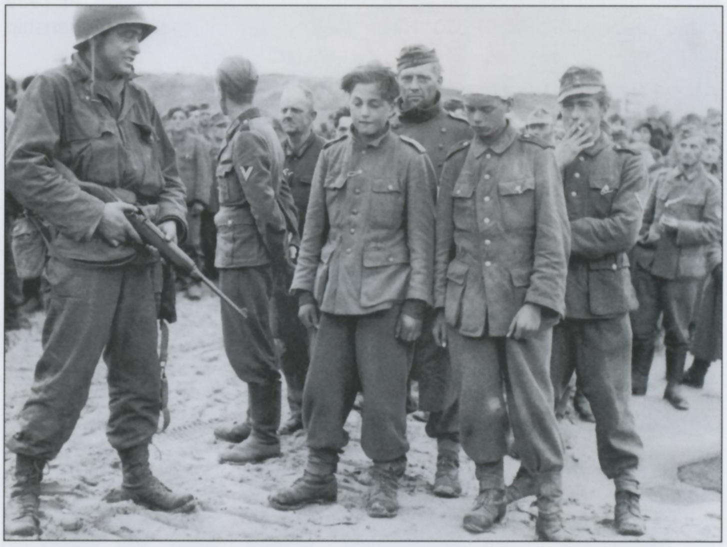
Reichsführer-SS Heinrich Himmler inspects new SS recruits from the Hitler Jugend at Kaiserslautern barracks in May 1943. To his left is Reichsjugendführer Artur Axmann, who replaced Baldur von Schirach on 8 August 1940, after having served in France. Before he had a chance to take over, he was sent to Russia where he was severely wounded, losing his right arm, in 1941. His awards include the ribbon of the Iron Cross Second Class, Silver Wound Badge awarded for the loss of a limb, the War Merit Cross First Class in silver without swords and an enameled Hitler Jugend sports badge pin. He also wears the Goldenes Parteiabzeichen (Gold Party Badge) awarded to the first 100,000 Nazi Party members.



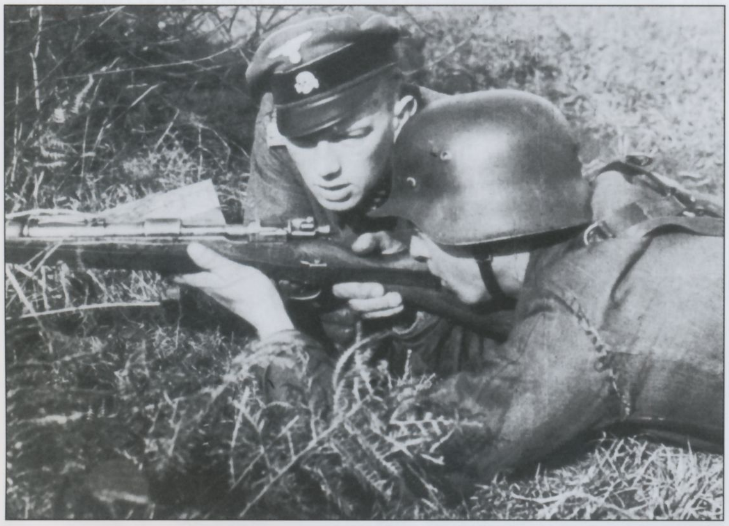
A group of NCO's on leave, visit an NSKK center where members of the Hitler Jugend receive instruction on the operation of motorcycles in early March 1944. The Knights Cross winner in the background is Oberwachtmeister Willi Kessel who served with 3.Kompanie of Panzer-Aufklärung-Abteilung 'Großdeutschland' as a platoon commander. He was awarded the Knights Cross on 23 February 1944 for an action on 23 October 1943, during which he led a small force that captured a hill overlooking the Dniepr River and, despite being wounded, held the position until relieved. Visits from veterans like this helped to promote national fervor among the Hitler Jugend.



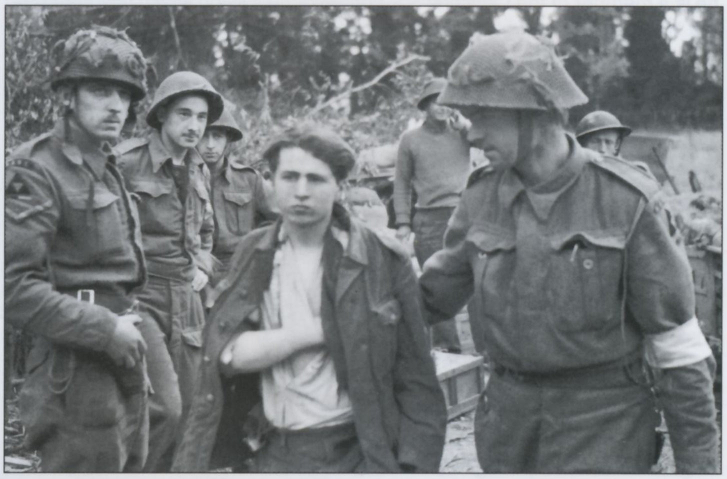
A Hitler Jugend youth drafted into the Wehrmacht scans the skies overhead from the safety of his foxhole, watching for Allied fighters that controlled the skies over Normandy. His weapon and equipment lying on the ground beside him would suggest that he was not in any immediate danger from Allied ground forces.



An American soldier stands guard over German prisoners from the 716.Infanterie-Division made up mainly of old men and young boys from the Hitler Jugend on Omaha Beach on 6-7 June 1944. Allied Intelligence believed that Omaha Beach was defended solely by the 716.Infanterie-Division, but unknown to them, the better equipped and trained 352.Infanterie-Division had moved up to the beach to reinforce them.

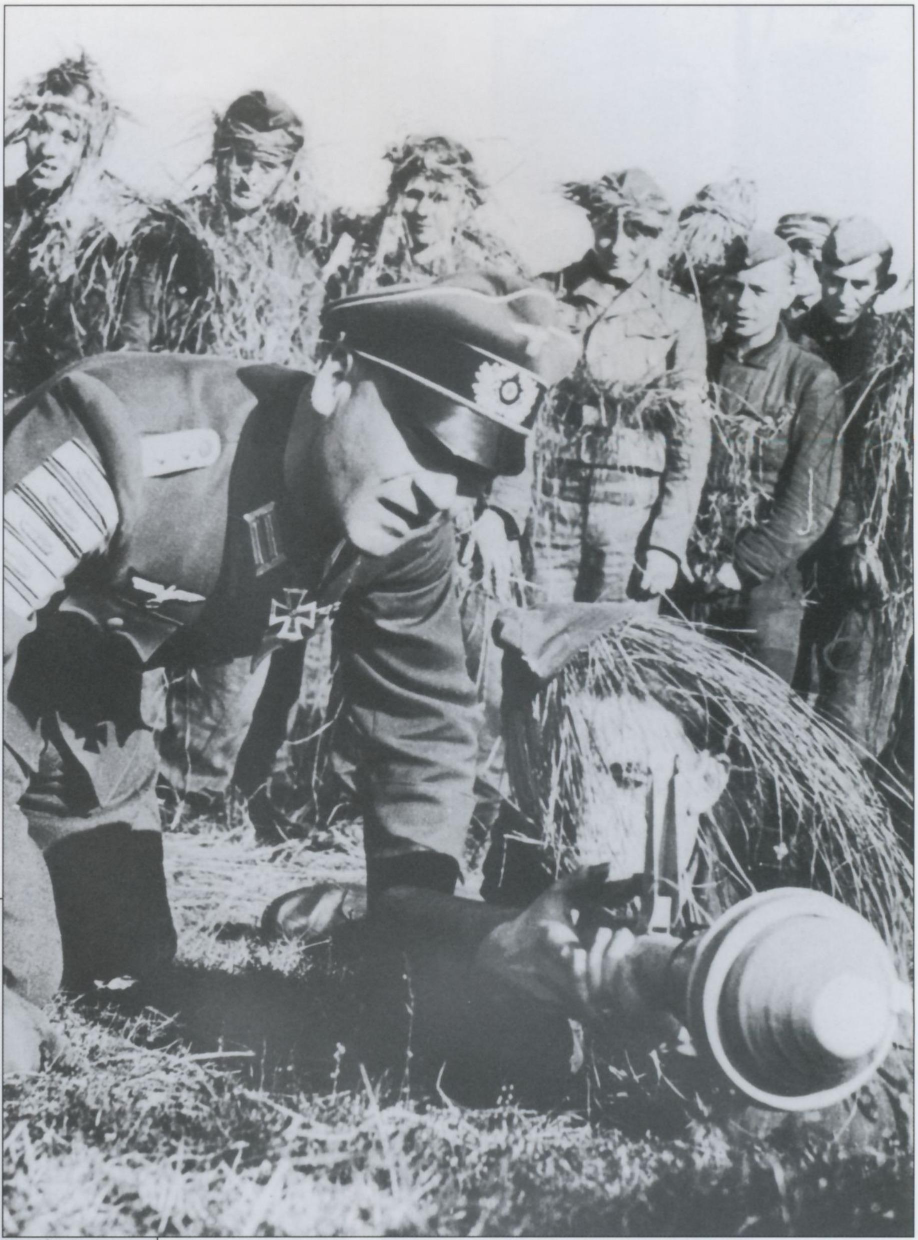


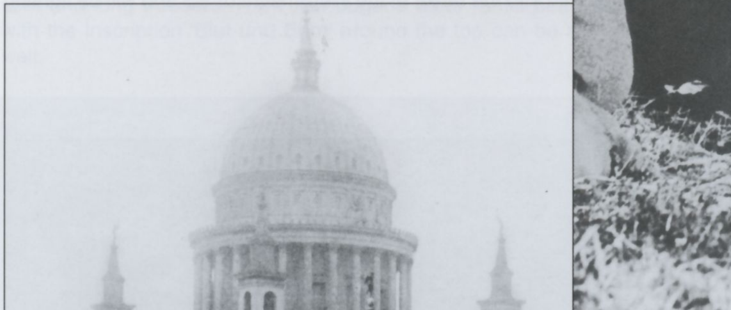
A new recruit takes aim with a Mauser Kar 98K rifle under the direction of an SS-Hauptsturmführer in Belgium, spring 1944. In a few weeks, boys like this would be fighting for their lives in the fields and hedgerows of Normandy.



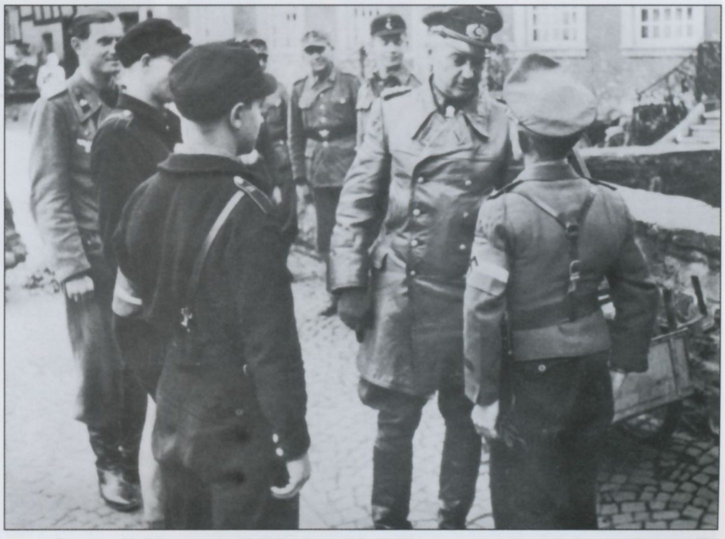
A slightly wounded Hitler Jugend youth from the Wehrmacht is led away by one of his captors from the Royal Army Service Corps of the British 3rd Infantry Division in Normandy. The Lance Corporal on the left is wearing a Mk I paratroopers helmet while four of the other British soldiers are wearing the new Mk III Infantry helmet issued to assault units for the Normandy invasion.

Hauptmann Kiesgen, winner of the Knights Cross and former Hitler Jugend leader, helps train new recruits in the use of the Panzerfaust 60. In the background several other Hitler Jugend, their uniforms stuffed with grass in an attempt at camouflage, wait their turn. The Hauptmann wears five tank destruction badges on his right sleeve, each one awarded for the single-handed destruction of an enemy armored vehicle.

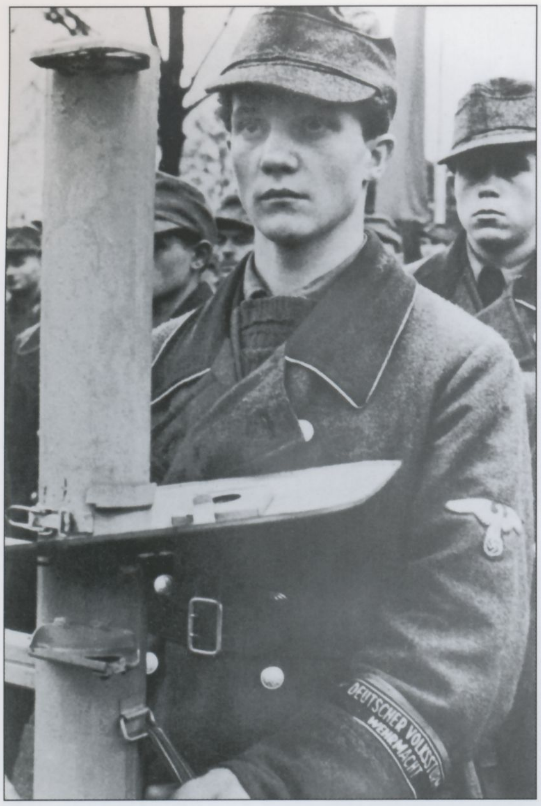




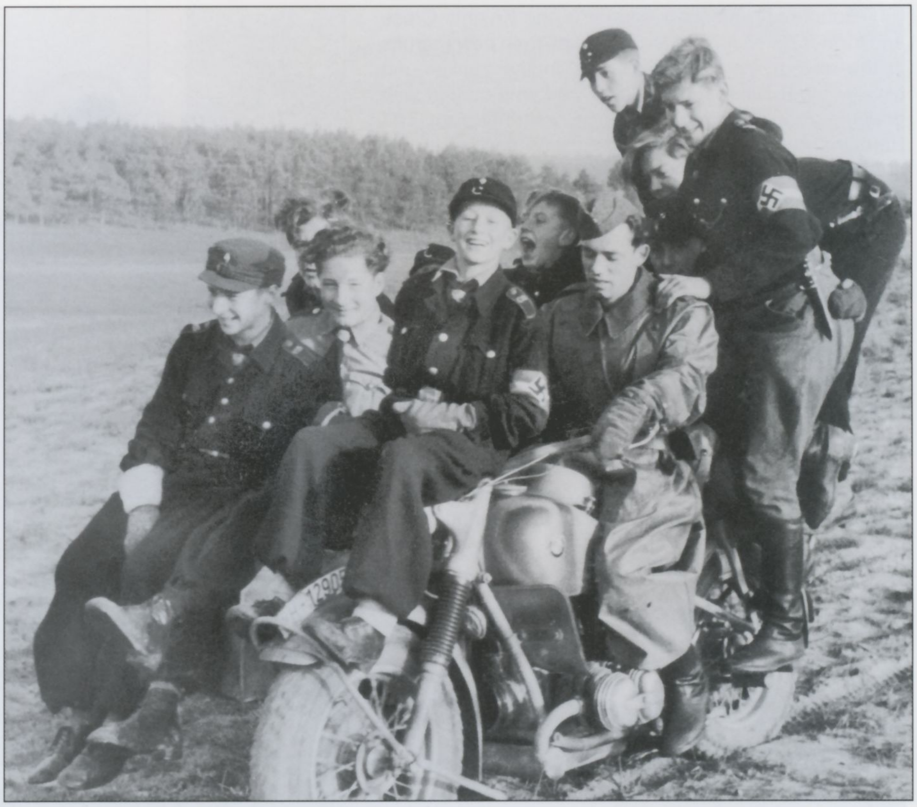
Reichsjugendführer Artur Axmann addresses a gathering of hundreds of Hitler Jugend and Marine-Hitlerjugend in Berlin on 10 October 1944. These boys, all born in 1928 were now eligible for voluntary service in the military.



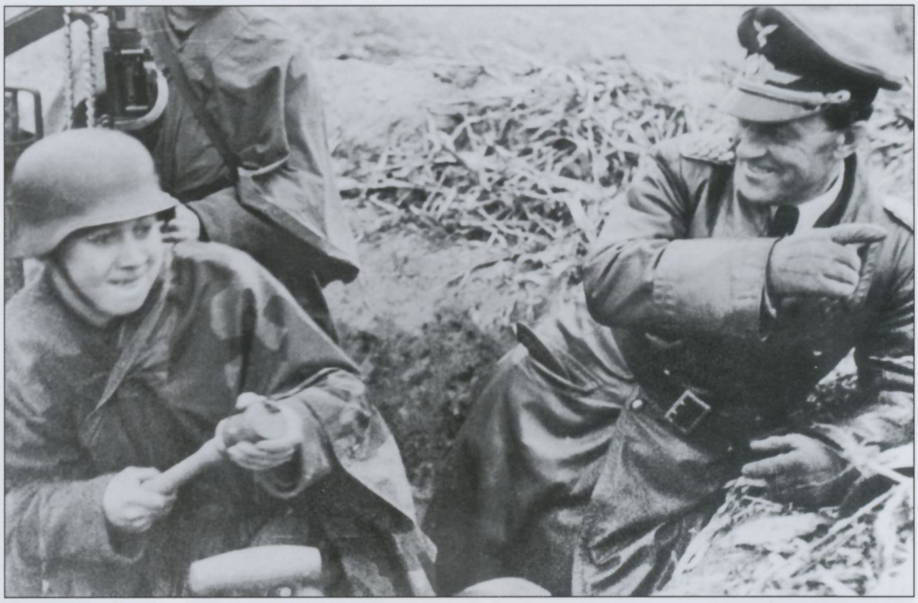
Generalfeldmarschall Walther Model, commander of Army Group B, speaks to a Hitler Jugend leader, standing stiffly at attention, in a town near the German border in October 1944. Hitler Jugend were utilized in a number of non-combat roles digging trenches and cleaning up debris resulting from air raids.



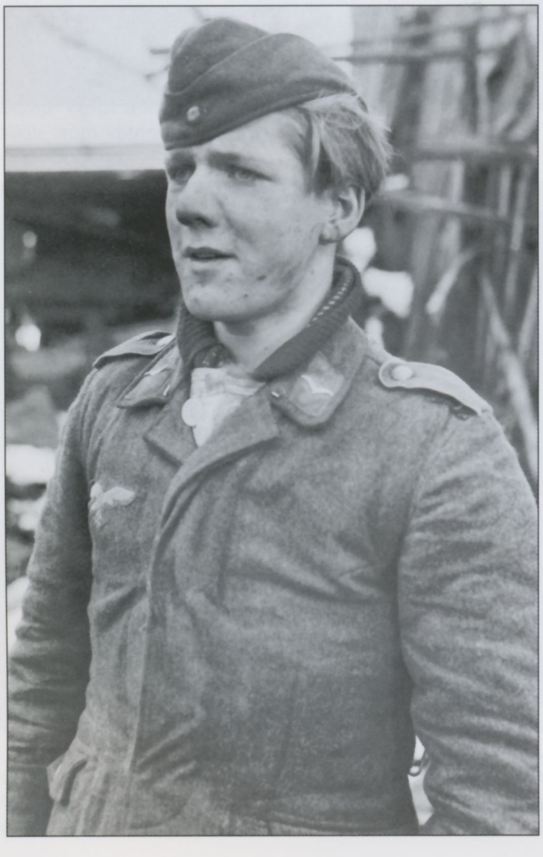
On 25 September 1944, Hitler approved the formation of the Volkssturm, or People's Army, to be manned by 16 year-old members of the Hitler Jugend and convalescent soldiers and able-bodied civilian men up to the age of 60. This former Hitler Jugend member has been issued an 8.8cm Raketenpanzerbüchse 54, often referred to as a Panzerschreck. The design was based on the American bazooka, examples of which were captured in Tunisia in 1943. The first model Raketenpanzerbüchse 43 did not have a protective shield and the operator had to wear protective clothing. This photo was taken on 23 November 1944.



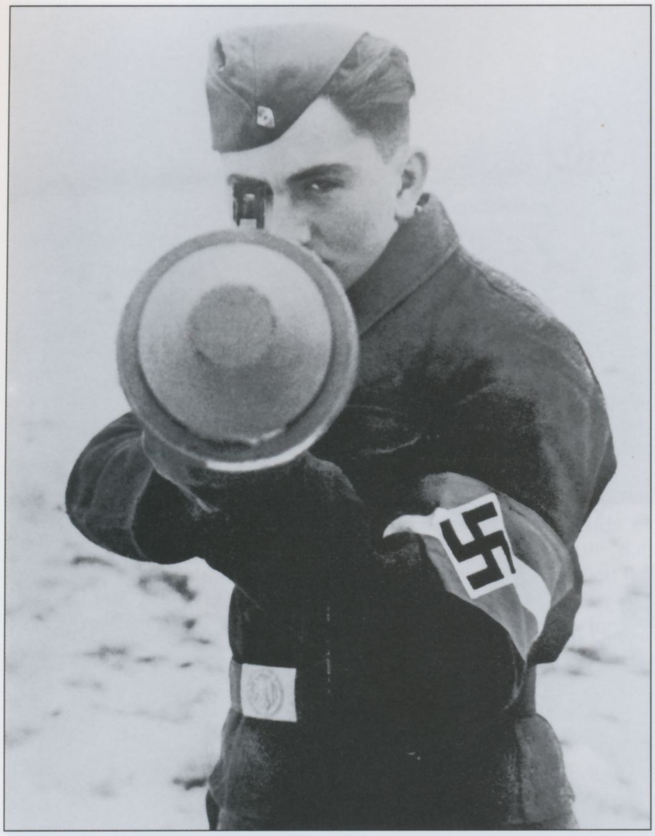
Several Hitler Jugend enjoy a ride on a BMW R75 motorcycle combination in November 1944. All but one is wearing the winter uniform, which consisted of a black jacket over the tan shirt and long trousers instead of shorts. The driver is wearing the popular rubberized motorcycle coat. Soon, these boys will be inducted into the ranks of the Wehrmacht or SS and will be fighting for their lives.



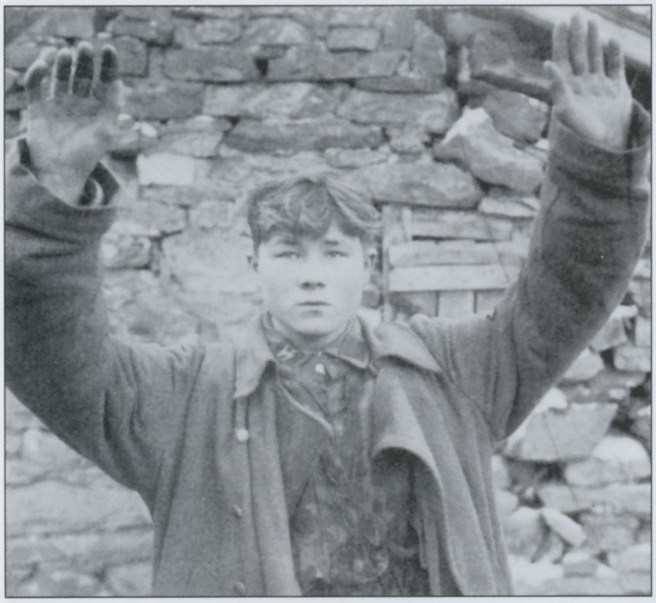
A Luftwaffe Generalmajor, inspecting a FlaK battery, watches in amusement as a young Kanonier throws a practice stick grenade in early January 1945. Both soldiers are wearing the splinter pattern Zeltbahn shelter quarter over their uniform while the General is wearing a privately purchased blue-gray leather greatcoat.



A former member of the Hitler Jugend drafted into the Luftwaffe, shortly after being captured by the Americans in early December 1944. He is wearing the Luftwaffe blue-gray post-1940 pattern Fliegerbluse with added side pockets and breast eagle and the standard Fliegermütze. His collar insignia indicates he holds the rank of Flieger.

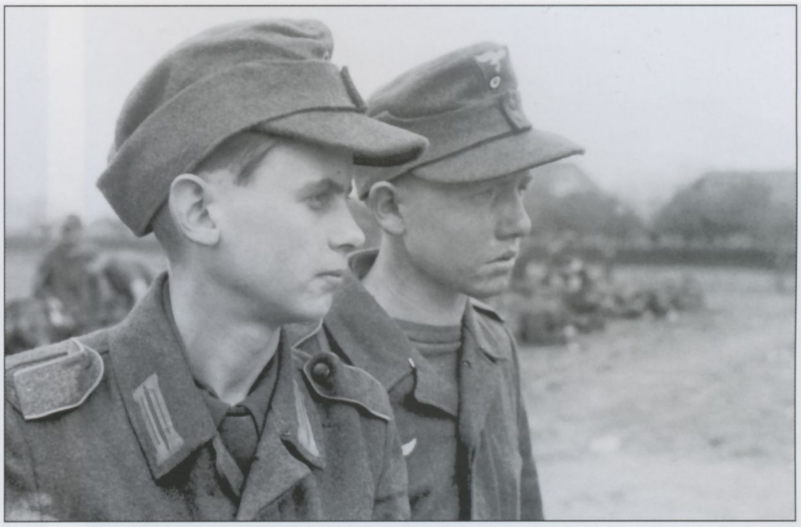


A member of the Hitler Jugend poses with a Panzerfaust 60 for the camera. He is wearing the winter uniform consisting of the black coat and long trousers. The Hitler Jugend other ranks belt buckle, with the inscription 'Blut und Ehre' around the top can be seen as well.

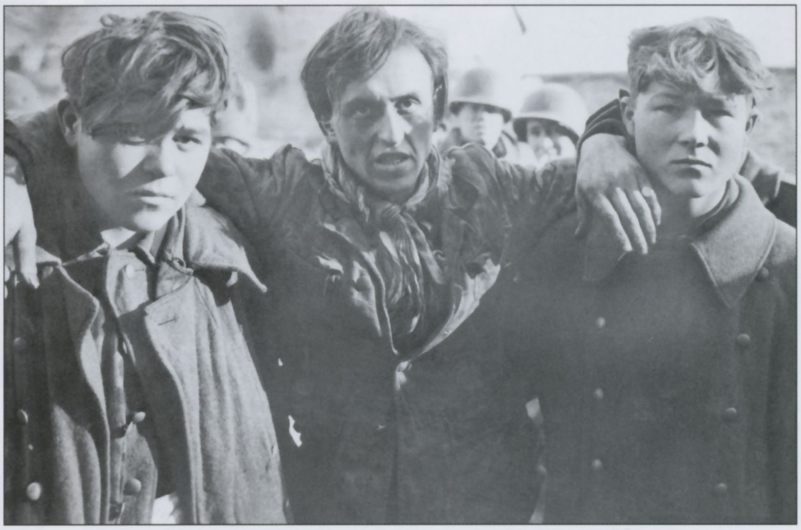


Here, the boy on the right photo has his hands raised and greatcoat open revealing a 'Plane Tree' pattern camouflage smock worn over his field-gray tunic.

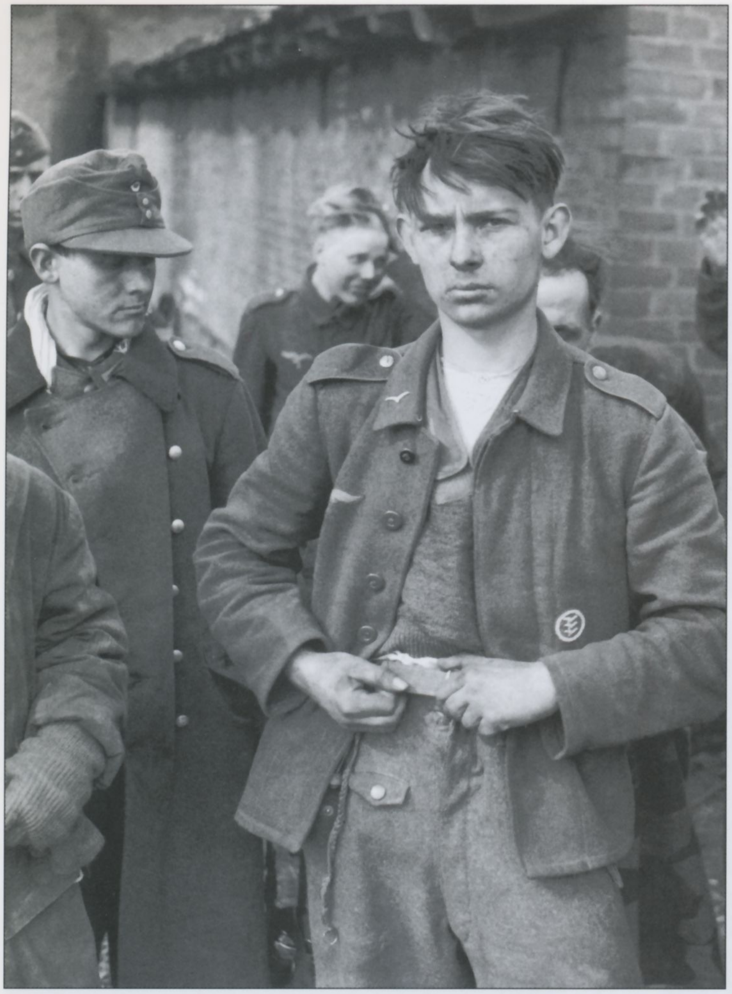
A group of German POW's sits in the grass waiting to be picked up and sent to a holding area after being captured in March 1945. As the Allied armies drove further into Germany, the quality of enemy troops they encountered declined steadily with many young boys pressed into service from the Hitler Jugend and old men previously considered unfit.



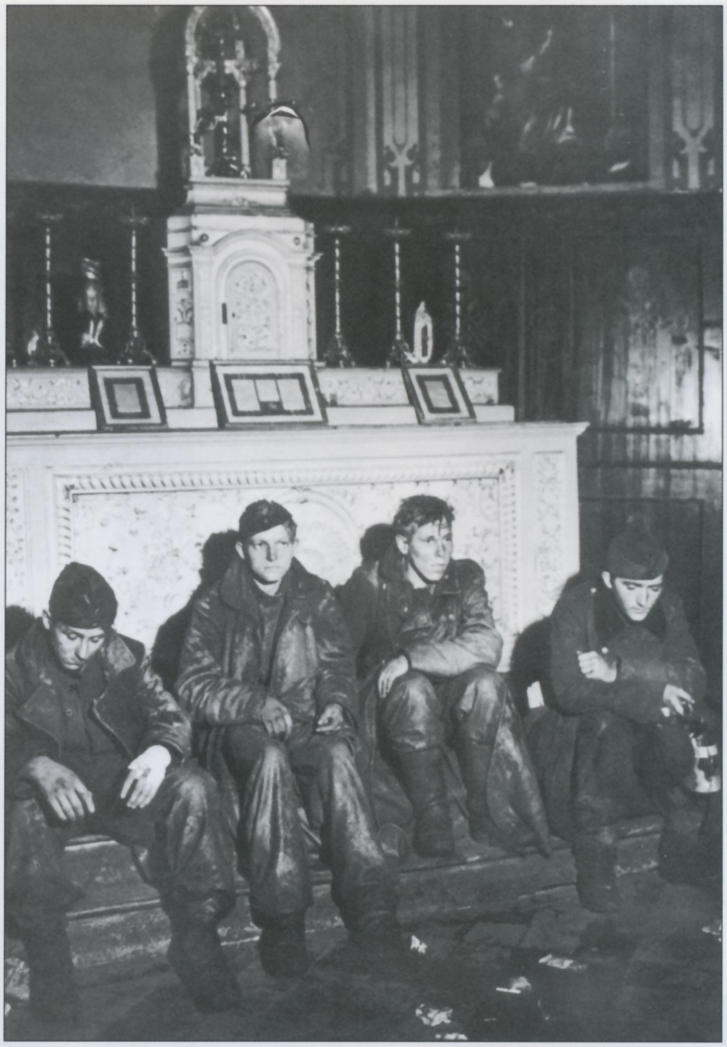
Two very young boys, one wearing the uniform of a Wehrmacht infantryman and the other a Luftwaffe Fliegerbluse, captured by the British Army during Operation 'Plunder', the crossing of the Rhine River on 24 March 1945.



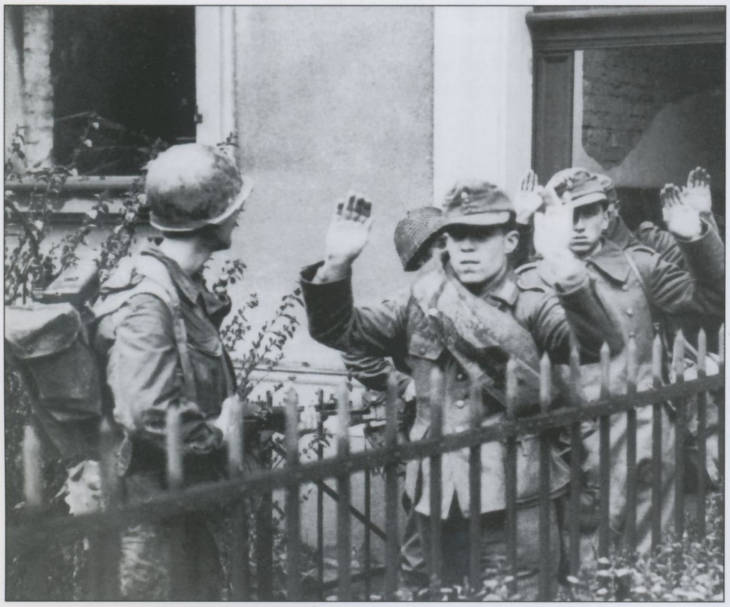
Two days earlier, General George Patton's Third Army had made a surprise crossing of the Rhine at Oppenheim. This disheveled trio of Waffen-SS youths, one of which is wounded, was captured by American troops in the days following the crossing. The boy on the left is wearing the M44 camouflage drill uniform under his greatcoat while the older boy in the middle wears an M44 camouflage drill tunic over his field-gray tunic, revealing the collar insignia of an SS-Rottenführer just visible beside his civilian scarf.



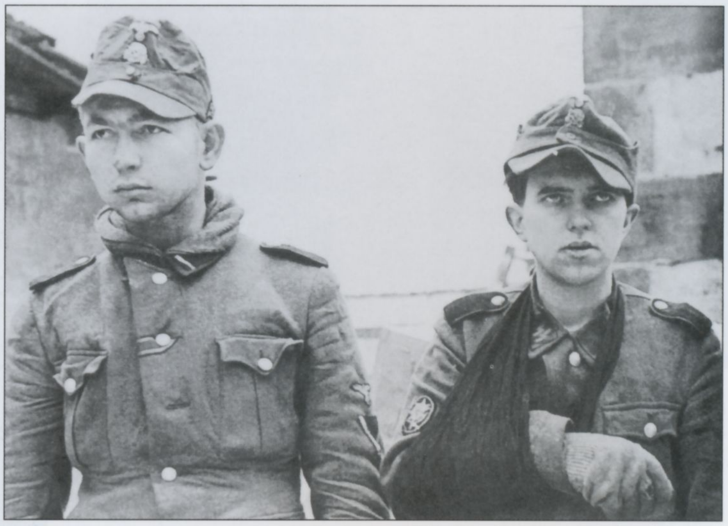
This Luftwaffe Flieger is hitching up his trousers after being searched by his captors. He appears to wear the pre-1940 pattern Fliegerbluse without pockets in the skirt and, interestingly, without collar patches. The round badge on his left breast looks like a variant of the pre-war Glider Pilot 'C' Level Proficiency Badge.



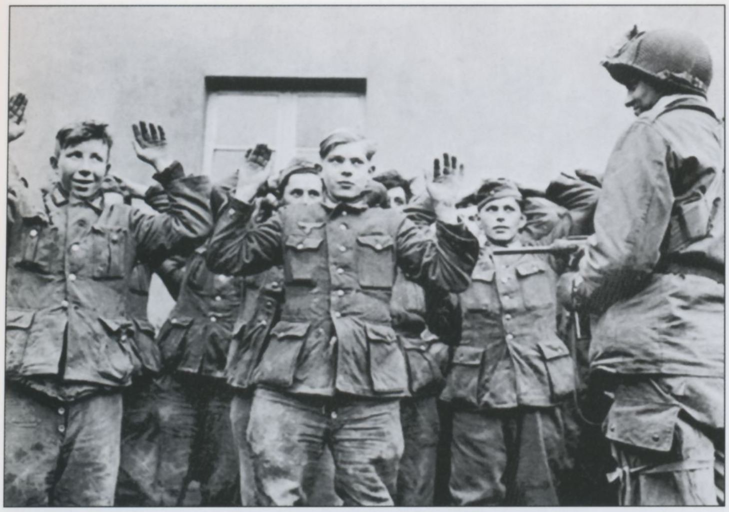
Four German youths, battle-weary, dirty and wounded, wait on the steps of an altar in a church somewhere in western Germany for transport to a POW camp. During this period in March 1945, the Allies reported large numbers of youths captured including 12 year-old children who were defending their villages and towns in a futile attempt to stem the Allied advance.



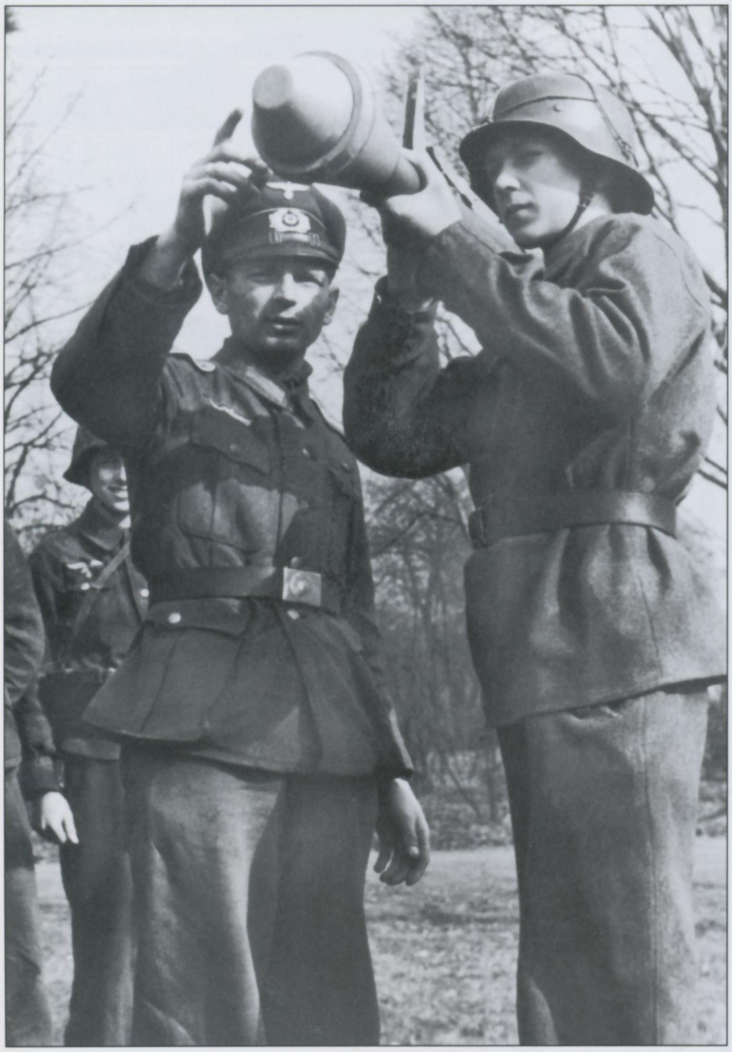
Three youths file out of a damaged building in Mannheim under the watchful gaze of American soldiers from the U.S. Seventh Army in March 1945. On 15 March, the U.S. Third and Seventh Armies and the French First Army launched an attack aimed at German industry in the Saar-Palatinate region, leading up to Operation 'Plunder'.



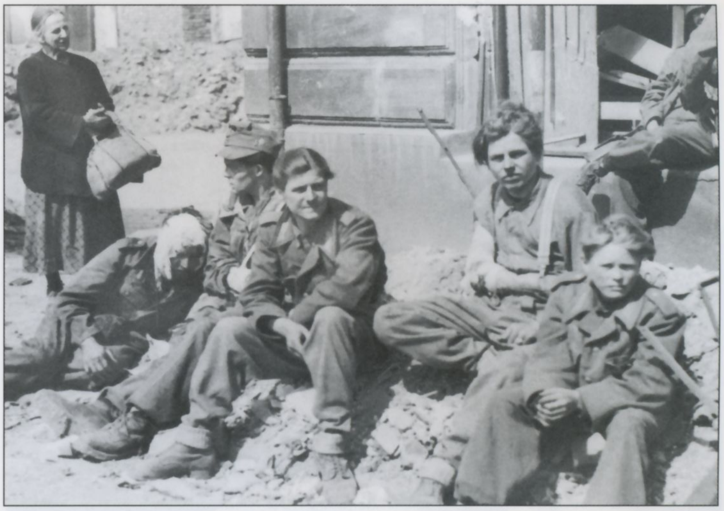
Two young soldiers, probably from 6.SS-Gebirgs-Division 'Nord', after surrendering to American troops in the Saar-Palatinate area in March 1945. On 14 March, the division counter-attacked the U.S. Third Army in the Hunsrück Mountain area, slowing down their advance by only one day. The SS pattern Gebirgsjäger Edelweiss armbadge on a black oval background can be seen on the right arm of their tunics. The SS-Rottenführer on the left has the ribbon of the Iron Cross Second Class sewn into the second buttonhole of his tunic and the SS pattern Edelweiss cloth cap badge sewn to the left side of his Bergmütze.



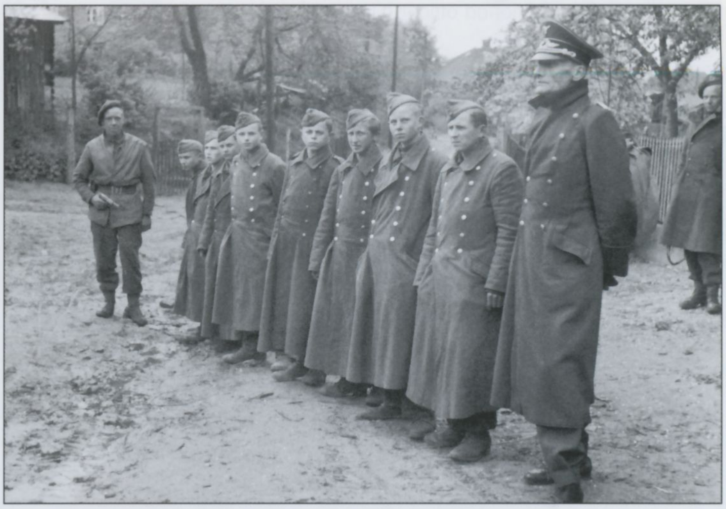
A U.S. paratrooper from the 17th Airborne Division guards a group of young Wehrmacht prisoners with his M3 submachine gun, dubbed the 'grease gun' due to the similarity of its appearance. The boy on the left is a veteran, wearing an M1936 uniform tunic with dark green collar and pleated pockets while the two boys on the right wear the later M1943 tunic with field-gray collar and plain pockets. Operation 'Varsity', the airborne component of Operation 'Plunder', was the last and largest one-day airborne assault of the war with over 21,000 troops of the U.S. 17th and British 6th Airborne Divisions transported in over 3,000 planes and gliders.



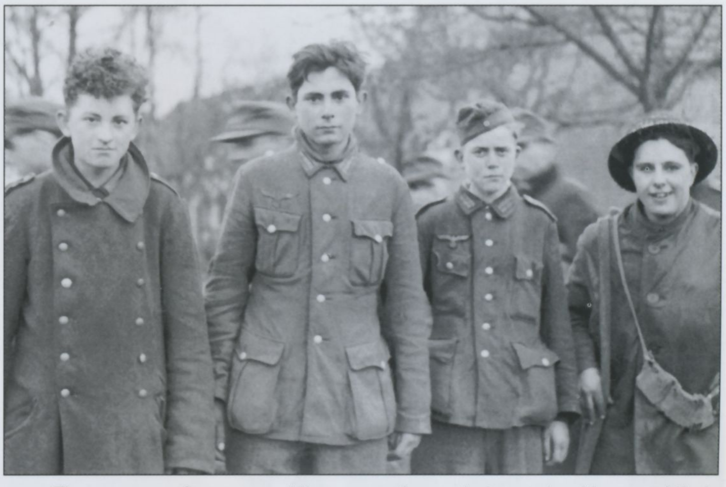
A Wehrmacht NCO gives instruction on aiming and firing the Panzerfaust 60 to a group of HJ-Flakhelfer in Berlin on 30 March 1945. The NCO is wearing an M1943 pattern service tunic with a field-gray collar but with earlier style pleated pockets and the NCOs' Schirmmütze. The HJ-Flakhelfer is wearing the special blue-gray pullover blouse and M35 steel helmet with Luftwaffe decal on the side.



A group of young Wehrmacht soldiers, some of who are severely wounded, sit in the rubble alongside the road for transport to a POW camp, guarded by their American captors. The second boy on the left is most likely from 2.Gebirgs-Division and wears the Army style metal Edelweiss badge on the side of his Bergmütze and distinctive climbing boots. The division took part in the fighting in the Saar and Moselle areas before retreating into southern Germany where it surrendered to American forces in May 1945.



Several young Luftwaffe soldiers accompanied by a Luftwaffe Generalmajor, stand in line under guard by their British captors. The General is wearing a pack on his back filled with personal belongings although it appears that the British soldier on the left has relieved him of his Walther P-38 pistol.

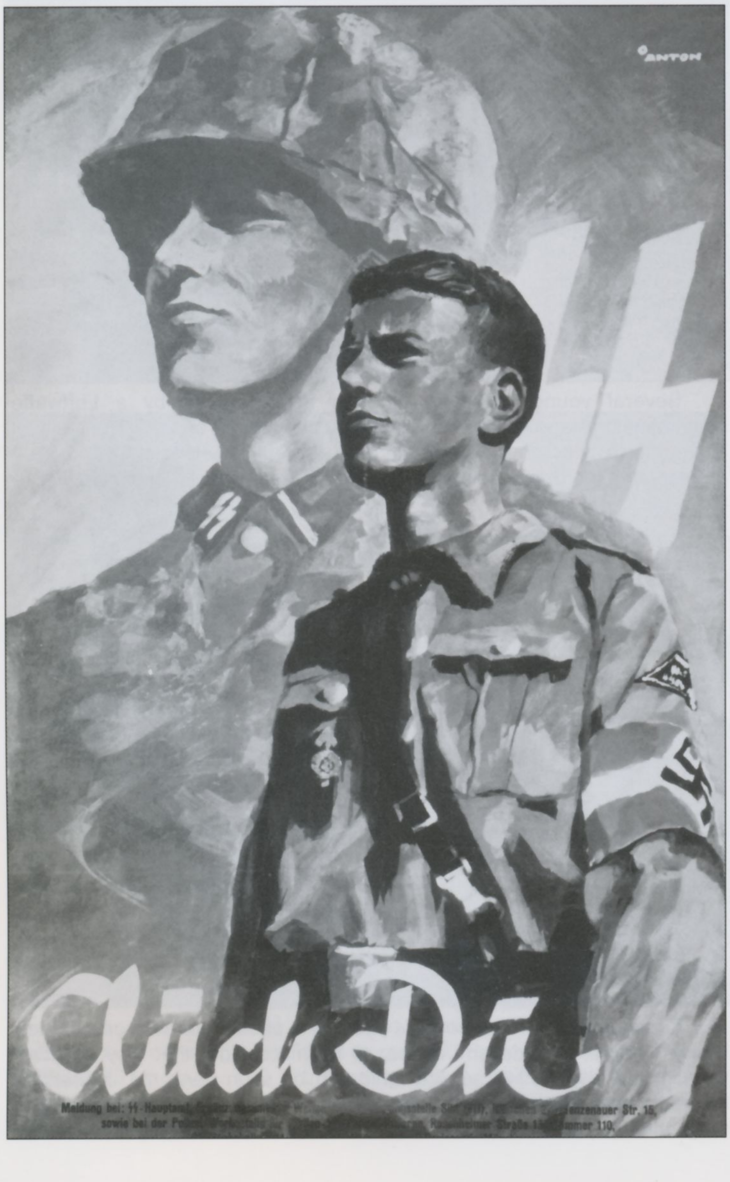


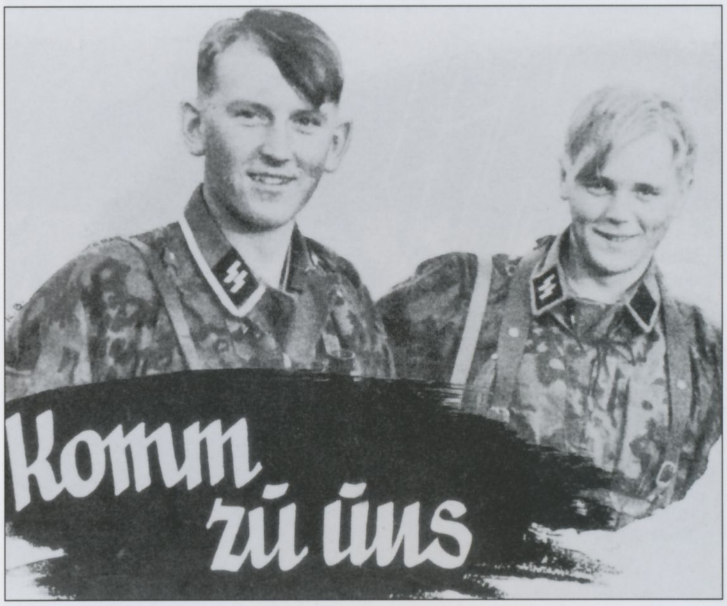
Three young German soldiers pose for a photograph with one of their British captors, who doesn't appear to be much older that they are. Two variations of the M1943 service tunic can be seen here, the differences being the pleated and plain pockets. Behind them, a column of older POW's make their way to a camp.

Wounded German youths receive one of the first hot meals they have had in many weeks at a German run military hospital inside British lines at Neuenkirchen in April 1945. Staffed entirely by German medical personnel, the hospital treated German soldiers and civilians alike. Those less seriously wounded soldiers would then be sent to POW camps. The single strip of braiding on the shoulder straps of the nearest boy, indicate he was an aspiring non-commissioned officer (Unteroffizieranwärter).

Unable to contain their joy that the war is finally over, a group of young soldiers surrender to American forces on 9 May 1945 in southern Germany, fortunate to be alive. Many did not surrender however, and continued to commit acts of sabotage until as late as the end of July.

12.SS-Panzer-Division 'Hitlerjugend' 1943-1945



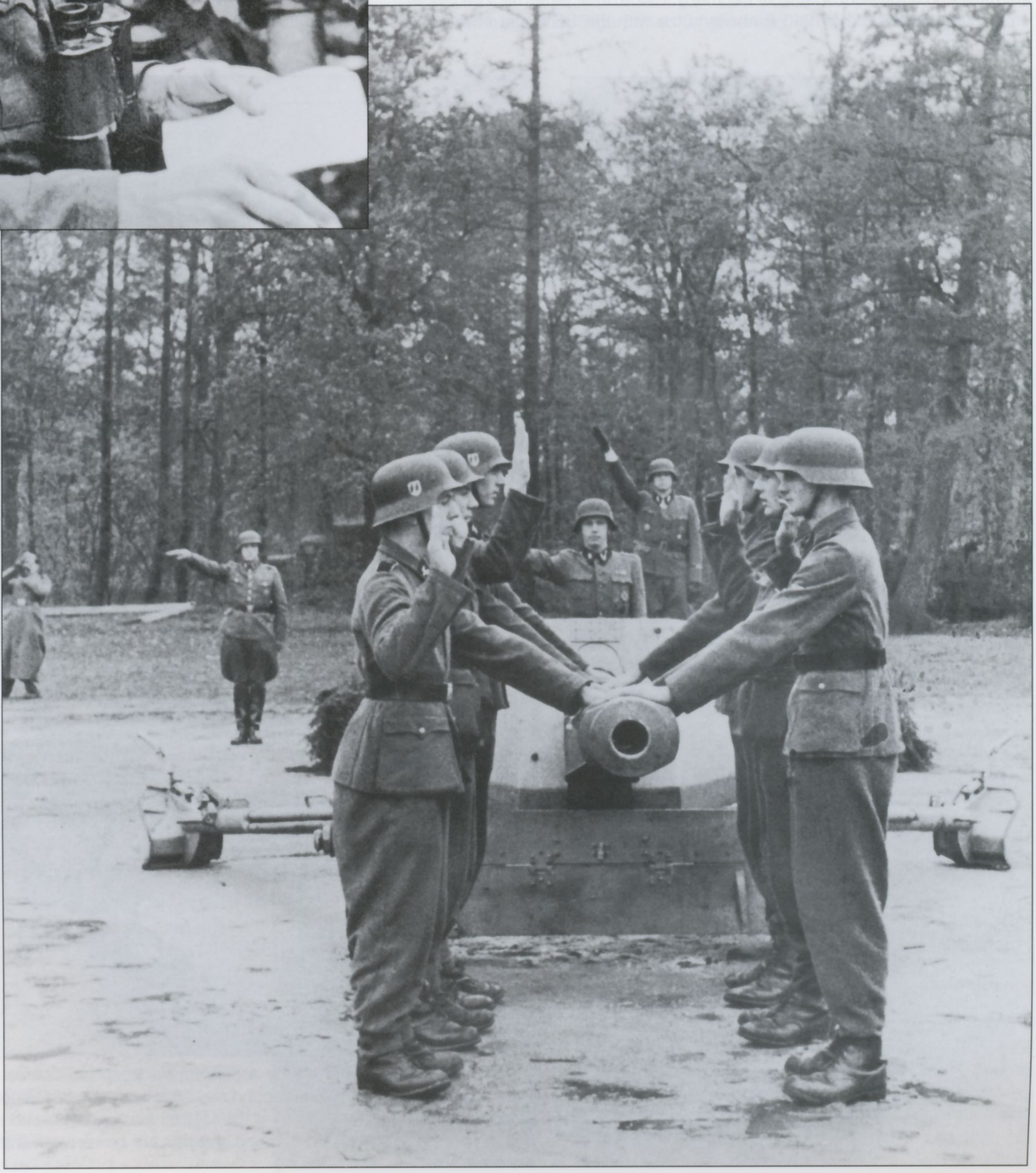


Another poster invites boys from the Hitler Jugend to 'Komm zü üns' (come with us) and join the ranks of the Waffen-SS. It is generally accepted that the idea to form a Waffen-SS division with 17 year old boys from the Hitler Jugend came from Reichsjugendführer Artur Axmann however it is more likely the idea came from SS-Gruppenführer Gottlob Berger, who was chief of the Waffen-SS Recruiting Office, in early February 1943.

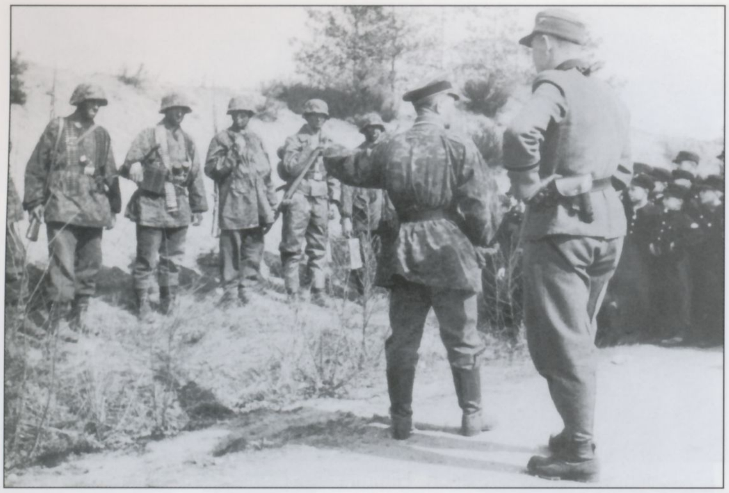
A recruiting poster from 1943 for the Waffen-SS invites members of the Hitler Jugend to volunteer with the phrase 'Aüch Dü' (Also You). A massive recruiting drive for the Waffen-SS concentrated heavily on the Hitler Jugend and thousands of posters such as this were distributed all over Germany calling for boys aged 16 to 18 to enlist.

Reichsführer-SS Heinrich Himmler inspects recruits into the new division at Kaiserslautern Barracks in May 1943. The new division was formed around a nucleus of experienced officers and NCOs who were obtained from SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Division 'Liebstandarte Adolf Hitler'. It would be up to these men to mould the Hitler Jugend youth into a potent combat unit.

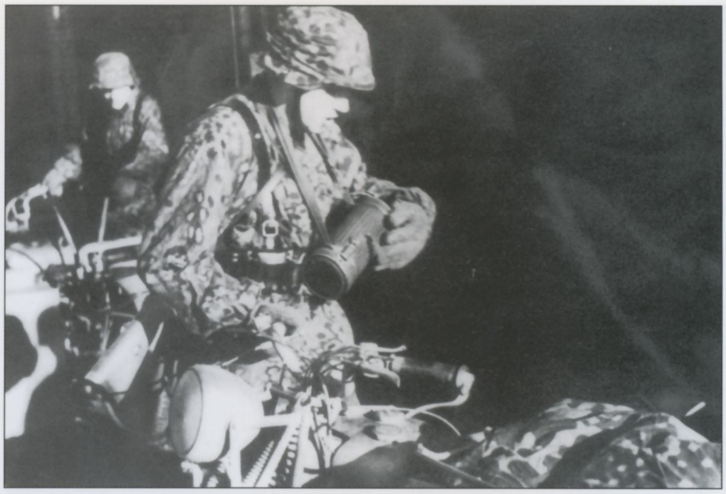
In August 1943, SS-Obersturmbannführer Kurt Meyer, shown here as an SS-Sturmbannführer in Russia earlier in the war, joined the division to command SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 25. One of the ablest commanders in the SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Division 'Liebstandarte Adolf Hitler', Meyer had a reputation as a tough but fair officer. He earned the nickname 'Panzer Meyer' after surviving an accidental fall from a building before the war.



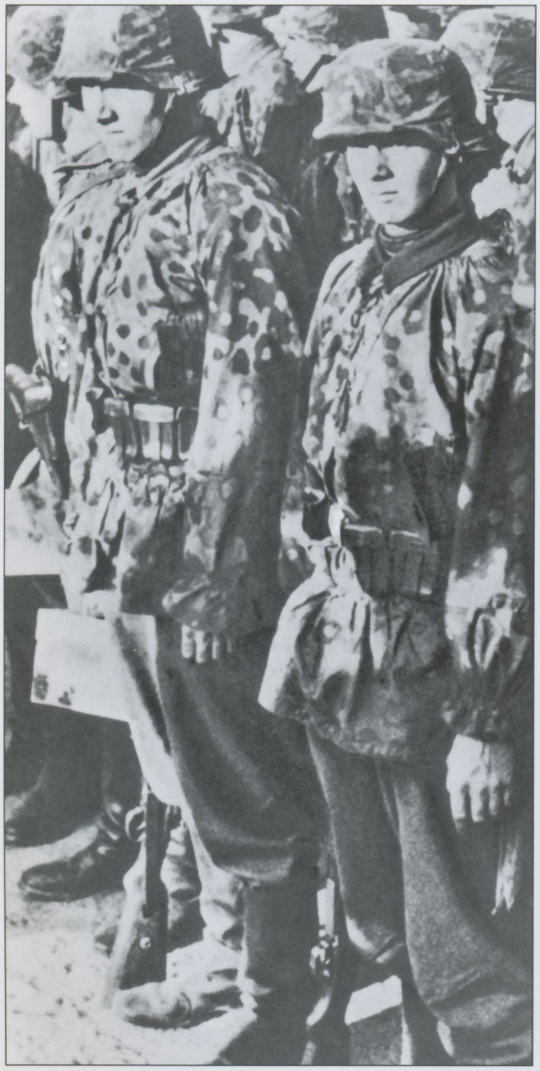
During the summer of 1943, the first 10,000 recruits began training at Beverlo in Belgium. Here, SS-Obersturmbannführer Kurt Meyer, in the background with Knights Cross, presides over a swearing in ceremony of new recruits in SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 25 on 9 November 1943. As they recite the oath, they place their right hands on the barrel of a 7.5cm PaK40 anti-tank gun, symbolizing their relation with the arms of the regiment.



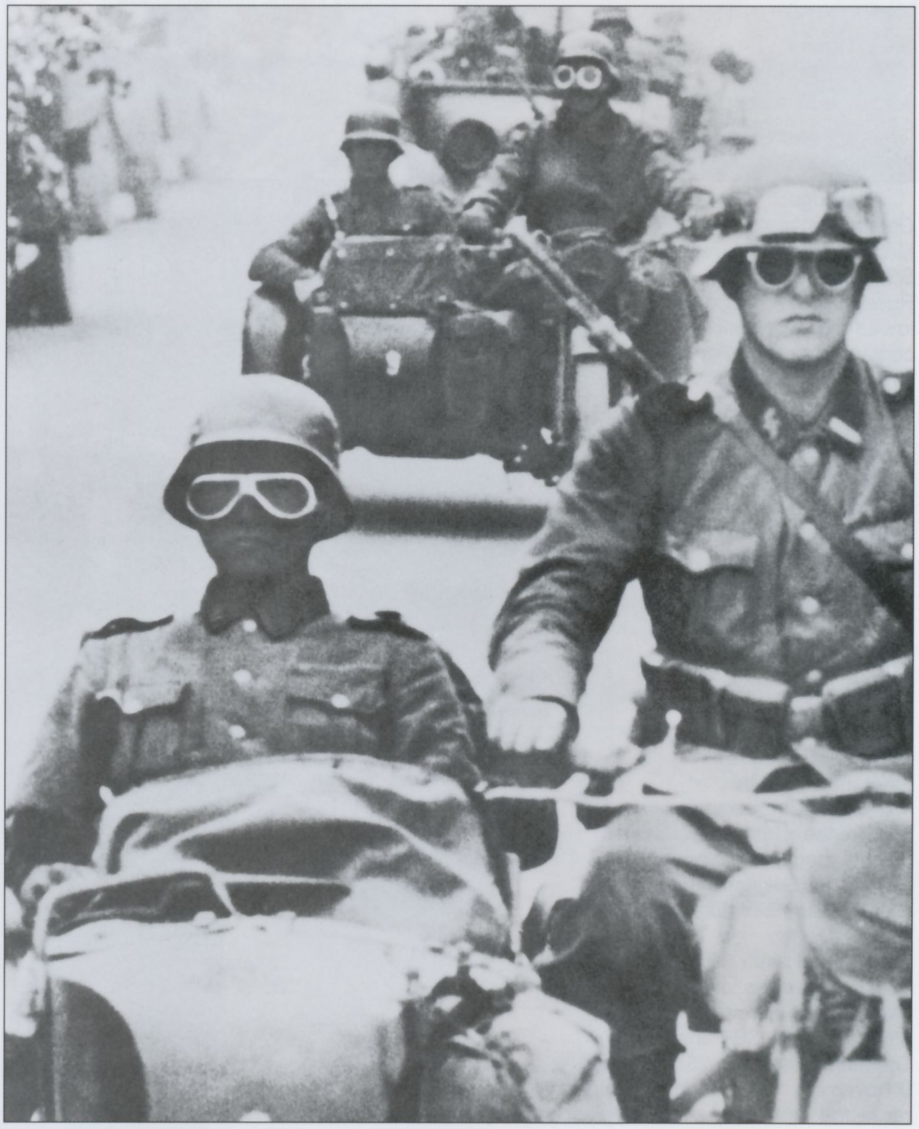
A group of 10-13 year-old Deutsche Jungvolk boys visit the Hitlerjugend training ground in Belgium in the spring of 1944. By that time the division was almost fully equipped and most of these boys have been issued with camouflage smocks. The officer addressing the young boys is wearing a Model 1942 camouflage smock, identifiable by the foliage loops sewn onto the back and shoulders, in one of the many 'Plane Tree' patterns. The officer on the right wears the M1943 Einheitsmütze with the SS eagle sewn onto the left side.



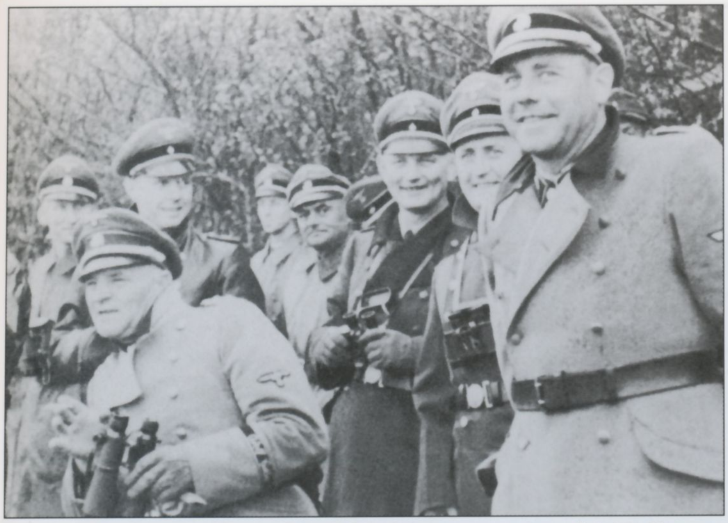
This 'Hitlerjugend' Kradschütz (motorcycle soldier) mounts an Italian Moto-Guzzi motorcycle combination in Belgium during the spring of 1944. He is wearing a Model 1940 camouflage smock in a 'Plane Tree' pattern and a matching helmet cover. The 12.SS-Panzer-Division 'Hitlerjugend' inherited a large quantity of Italian manufactured transport that had been confiscated by 1.SS-Panzer-Division 'Leibstandarte' in the fall of 1943 after the Italian surrender.



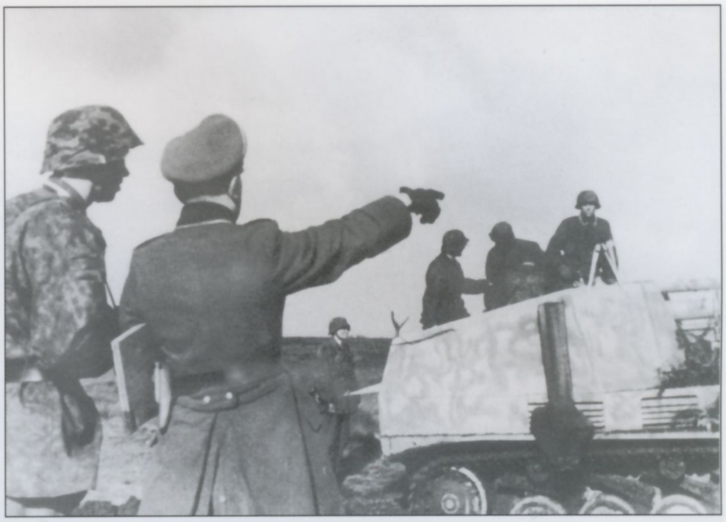
These two 'Hitlerjugend' troops are wearing the Model 1940 style camouflage smock in a 'Plane Tree' pattern with a different pattern of 'Plane Tree' camouflage helmet cover. Few of these uniforms were available at the beginning of basic training forcing the new recruits to wear their Hitler Jugend uniform or civilian clothes.



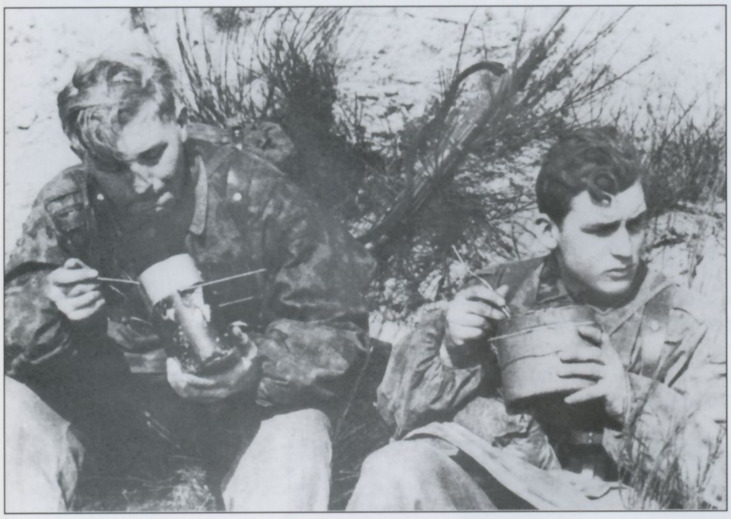
A motorized column led by a motorcycle troop passes by a row of vehicles camouflaged with foliage. The driver of the second machine is wearing the special rubberized motorcycle coat while the other riders are wearing the M1936 service tunic with pleated pockets and dark green collar. Three different styles of riding goggles are being worn with a fourth style on the helmet of the lead driver.



SS-Obergruppenführer 'Sepp' Dietrich, commander of 1.SS-Panzer-Korps 'Leibstandarte Adolf Hitler', accompanied by Reichsjugendführer Artur Axmann and other 'Hitlerjugend' officers observes the division in a training exercise in March 1944. Visible on the right is SS-Brigadeführer und Generalmajor der Waffen-SS Fritz Witt, the first commanding officer of the division. Axmann can be seen over his right shoulder. Directly above Dietrich's head is SS-Sturmbannführer Arnold Jürgensen, commander of I./SS-Panzer-Regiment 12.

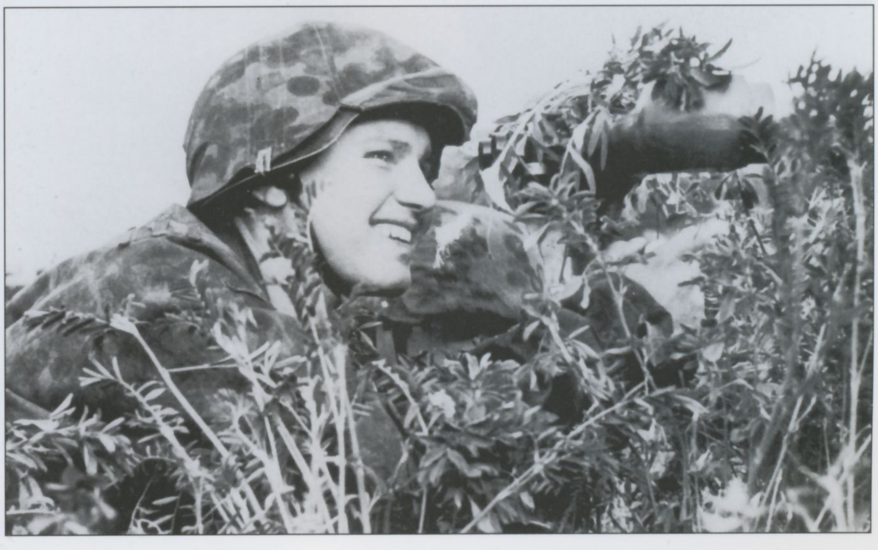


A 'Wespe' self-propelled howitzer from I./SS-Panzer-Artillerie-Regiment 12 prepares to fire during the training exercise directed by the battery commander. There were two batteries of 'Wespe', mounting the 10.5cm leFH18 howitzer, in the battalion and one battery of 'Hummel' which mounted the 15cm sFH18 howitzer. The vehicle is painted in overall dark yellow with a camouflage pattern of green and brown lines sprayed over.

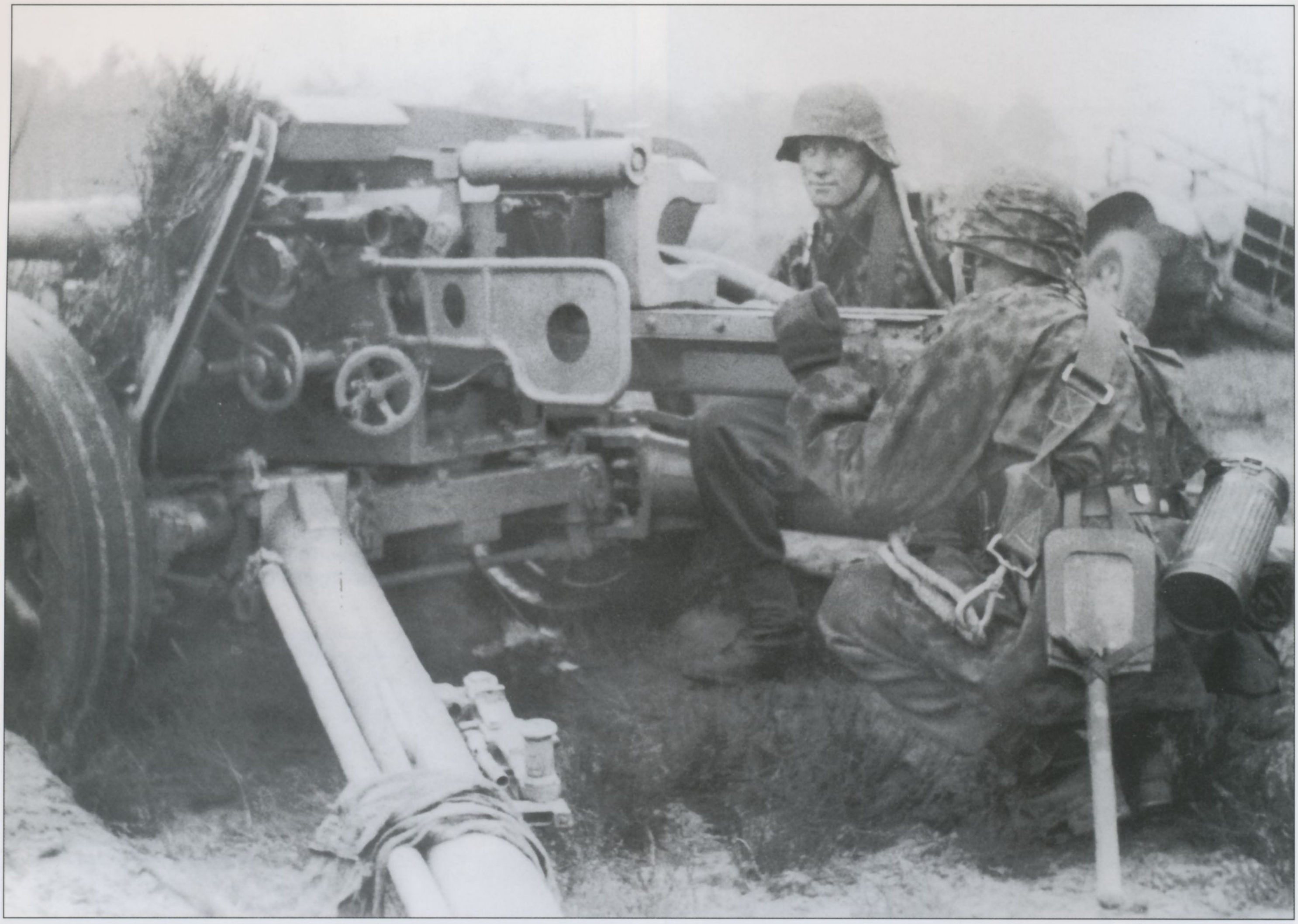


Two 'Hitlerjugend' grenadiers pause for lunch during training. Both men are wearing the Model 1942 camouflage smock with foliage loops sewn on to the front and back of the shoulders and upper arms and are carrying a full kit suspended from leather 'Y' straps. Special weekly rations were allotted for each boy consisting of 3.5 liters of fresh milk, 1,750 grams of bread, 200 grams of meat, 140 grams of lard, 120 grams of sugar and 245 grams of other nutrients.

Although smoking and drinking were strictly forbidden among the youth of the division, it was not always possible to police them every moment of the day. Here, three boys share a cigar during a break in training.

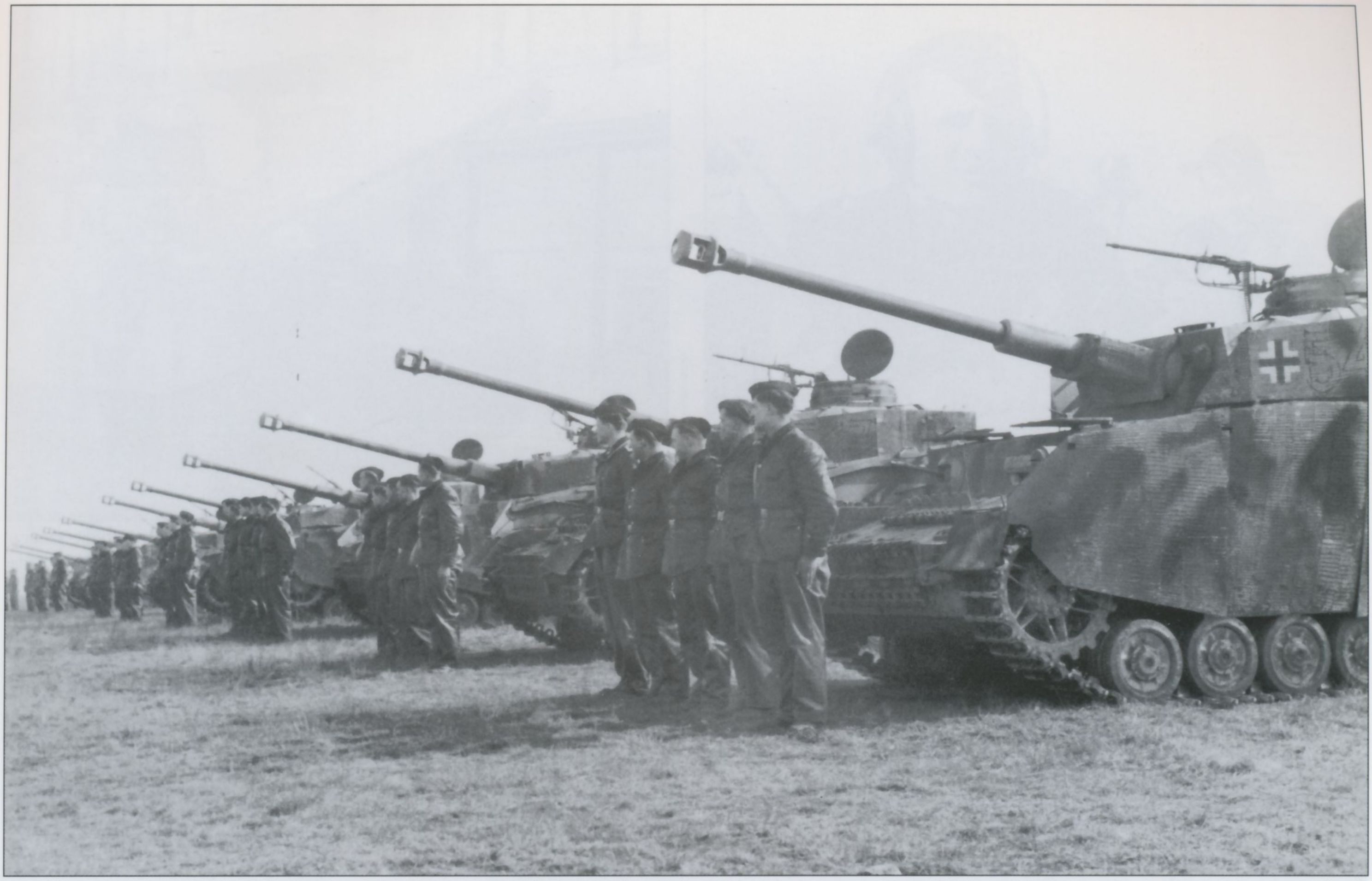


Two 'Hitlerjugend' grenadiers, concealed in the tall grass, scan the ground in front of them with a powerful pair of binoculars mounted on a tripod. The Model 1942 camouflage smock with foliage loops and matching helmet cover in a 'Plane Tree' pattern is being worn and this photo well illustrates how effective it was.

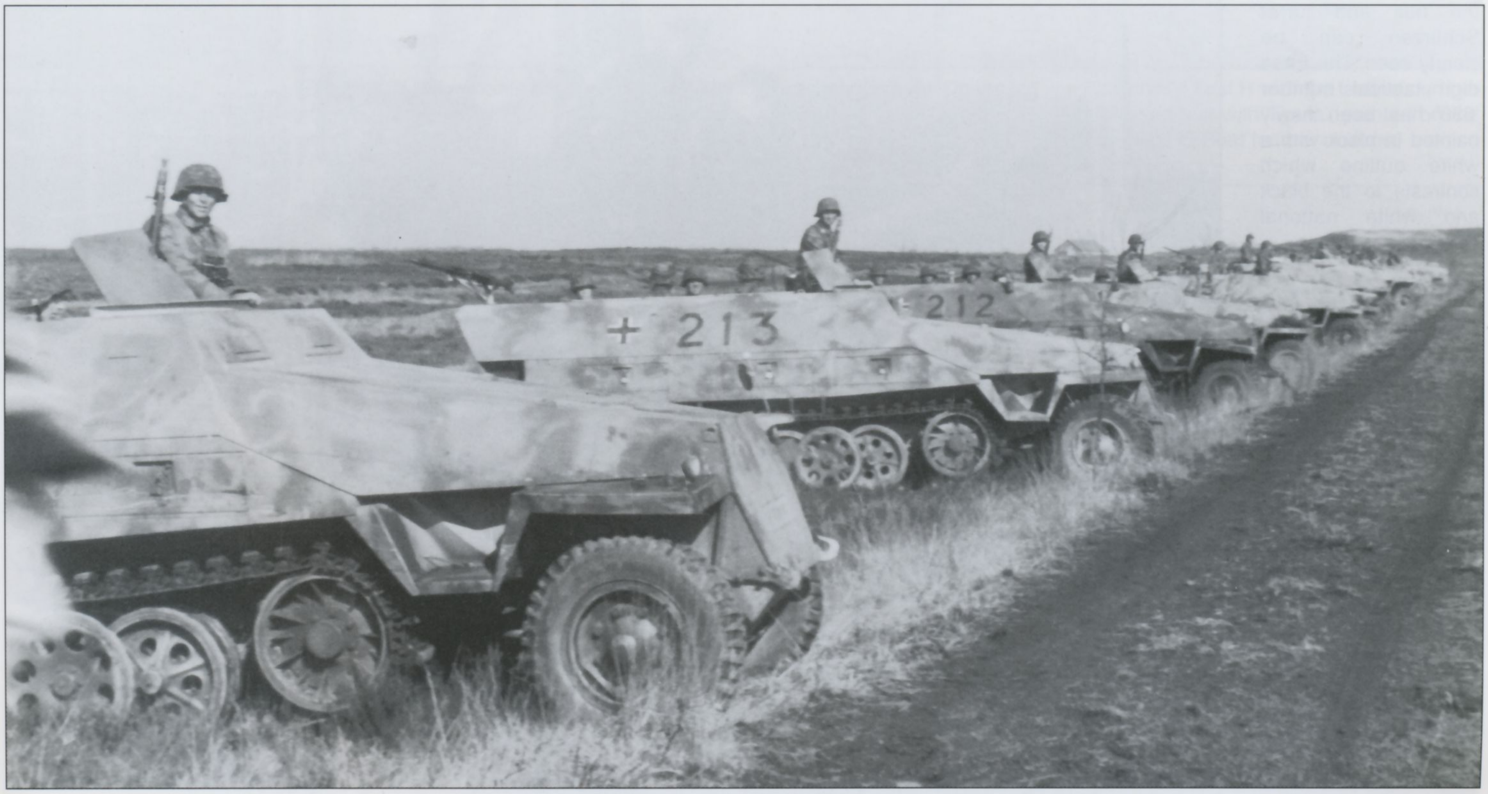


A 7.5cm PaK40 anti-tank gun from the SS-Divisions-Begleit-Kompanie prepares to fire during an exercise near Turnhout, Belgium in the spring of 1944. The web and leather belts over the gun crew shoulders were used to help the men manhandle the heavy gun into place. The Italian made SPA tractor in the background has become stuck in the soft ground, forcing the men to do just that. They are carrying a full set of equipment on their black leather 'Y' straps including the small entrenching tool, M1938 gas mask case, bread bag and, what appears to be a rolled up Zeltbahn shelter quarter.

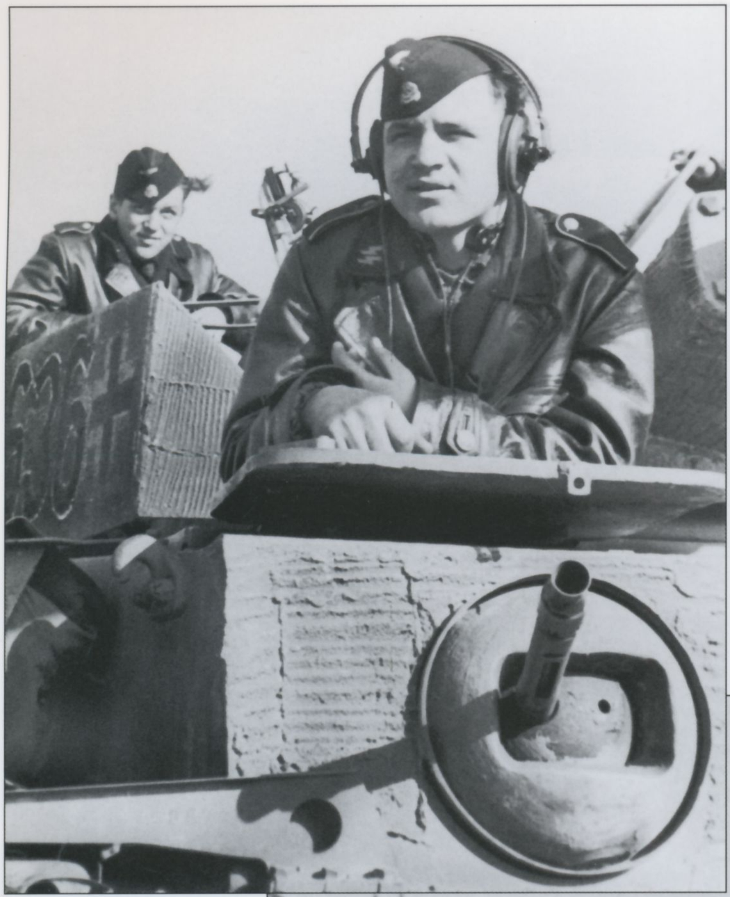
Two boys from SS-Panzer-Pioniere-Bataillon 12 training in the use of a Flammenwerfer 41 flame-thrower in Belgium during the spring of 1944. The Flammenwerfer 41 consisted of two cylinders, the smaller upper one carrying the nitrogen propellant and the larger one below carrying the fuel. A special protective suit was provided but was seldom used as it was too cumbersome.

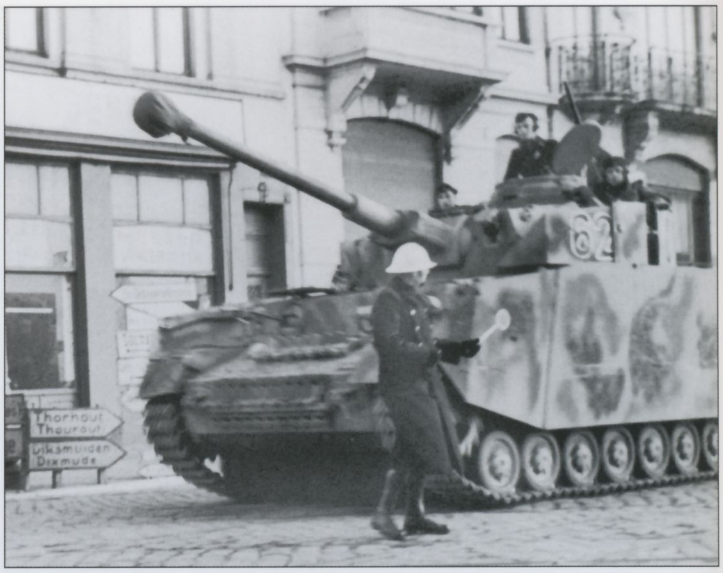


Here, the crews from 5.Kompanie of II./SS-Panzer-Regiment 12 line up in front of their new Pz.Kpfw.IV Ausf.H for inspection. The vehicles are painted in overall dark yellow and have a camouflage scheme of green and red-brown patches sprayed randomly over. A coat of Zimmerit anti-magnetic mine paste has also been applied at the factory to the turret and hull side skirts (Schürzen). At this time, the three digit tactical numbers were painted in a black stenciled outline. All members of the crew are wearing the black leather Kriegsmarine U-Boat jacket and trousers which had been originally provided to the Italian Navy. They had been brought back to Germany by 1.SS-Panzer-Division 'Leibstandarte' in the fall of 1943 after Mussolini had been deposed.



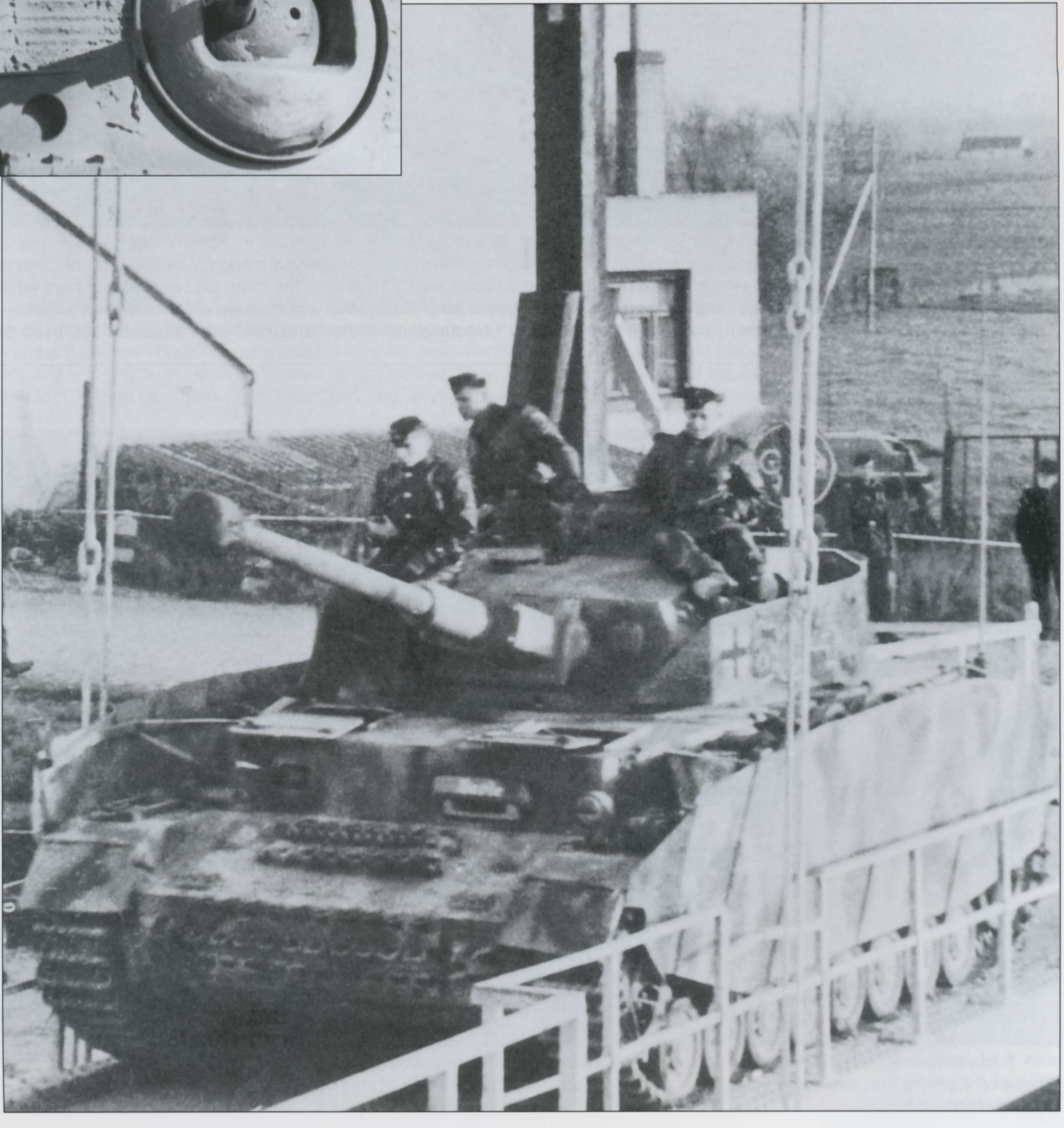
A row of new Sd.Kfz.251/1 Ausf.D armored half-track personnel carriers from III./SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 26 during von Rundstedt's inspection. These vehicles are also painted in overall dark yellow with a camouflage scheme of green and red-brown patches. The three digit tactical numbers are painted in solid black.



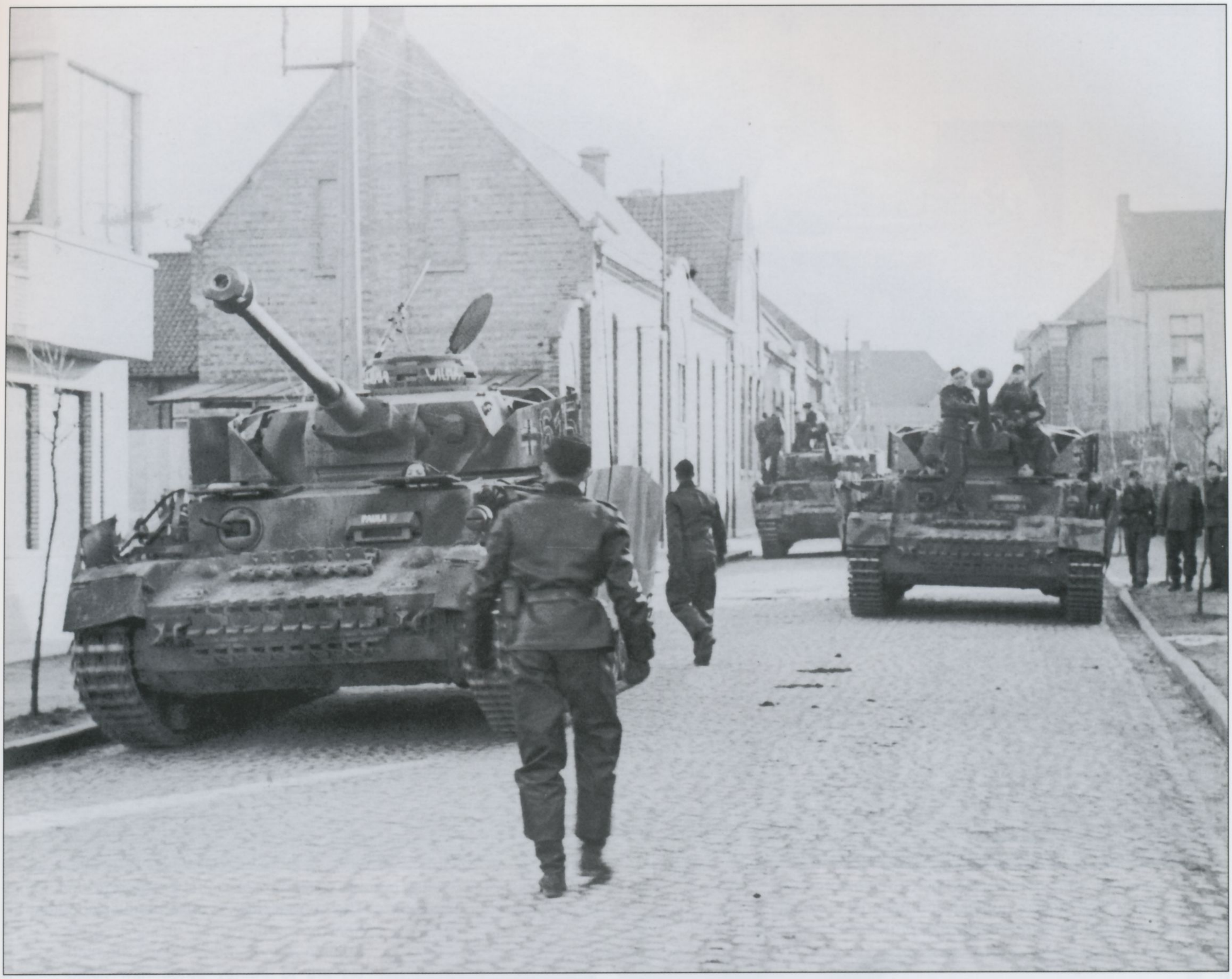


A Pz.Kpfw.IV Ausf.H from 6.Kompanie with the three digit tactical number '625' makes its way through a Belgian town south of Bruges, while a Belgian policeman directs traffic. Note how this vehicle does not have the Zimmerit coating on the turret and hull side Schürzen.

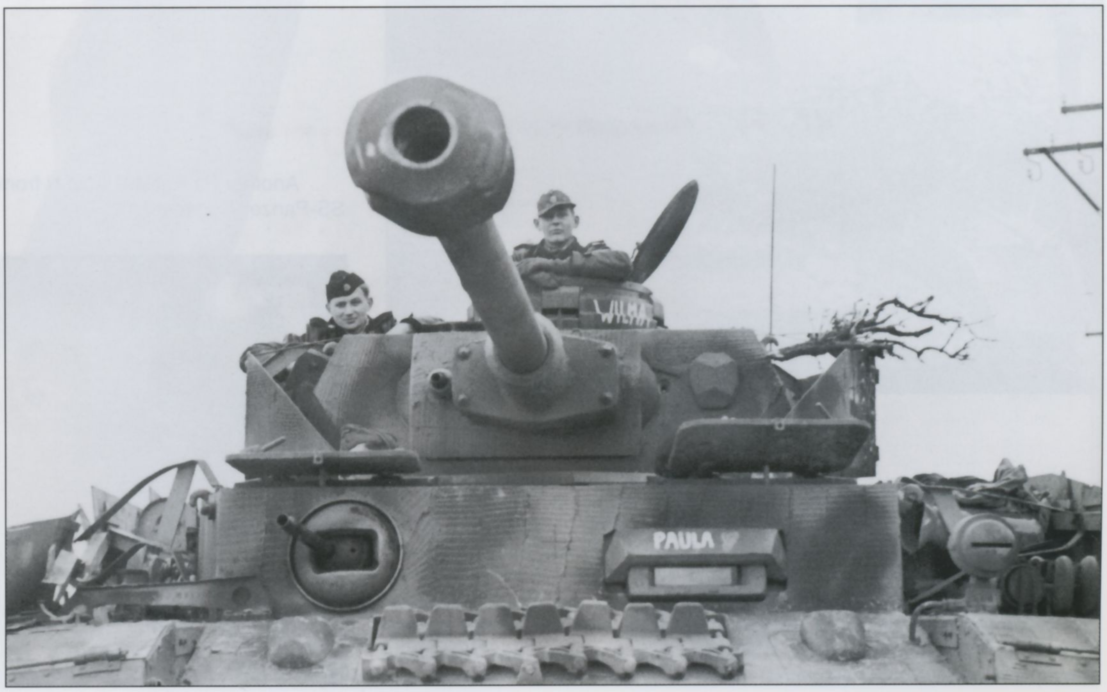
Radio operator, SS-Sturmmann Erich Moro, and loader, SS-Sturmmann Georg Fugunt in their Pz.Kpfw.IV Ausf.H. The texture of the Zimmerit coating on the front of the hull and turret Schürzen can be clearly seen. The three digit tactical number '636' has been newly painted in black with a white outline which contrasts to the black and white national cross.



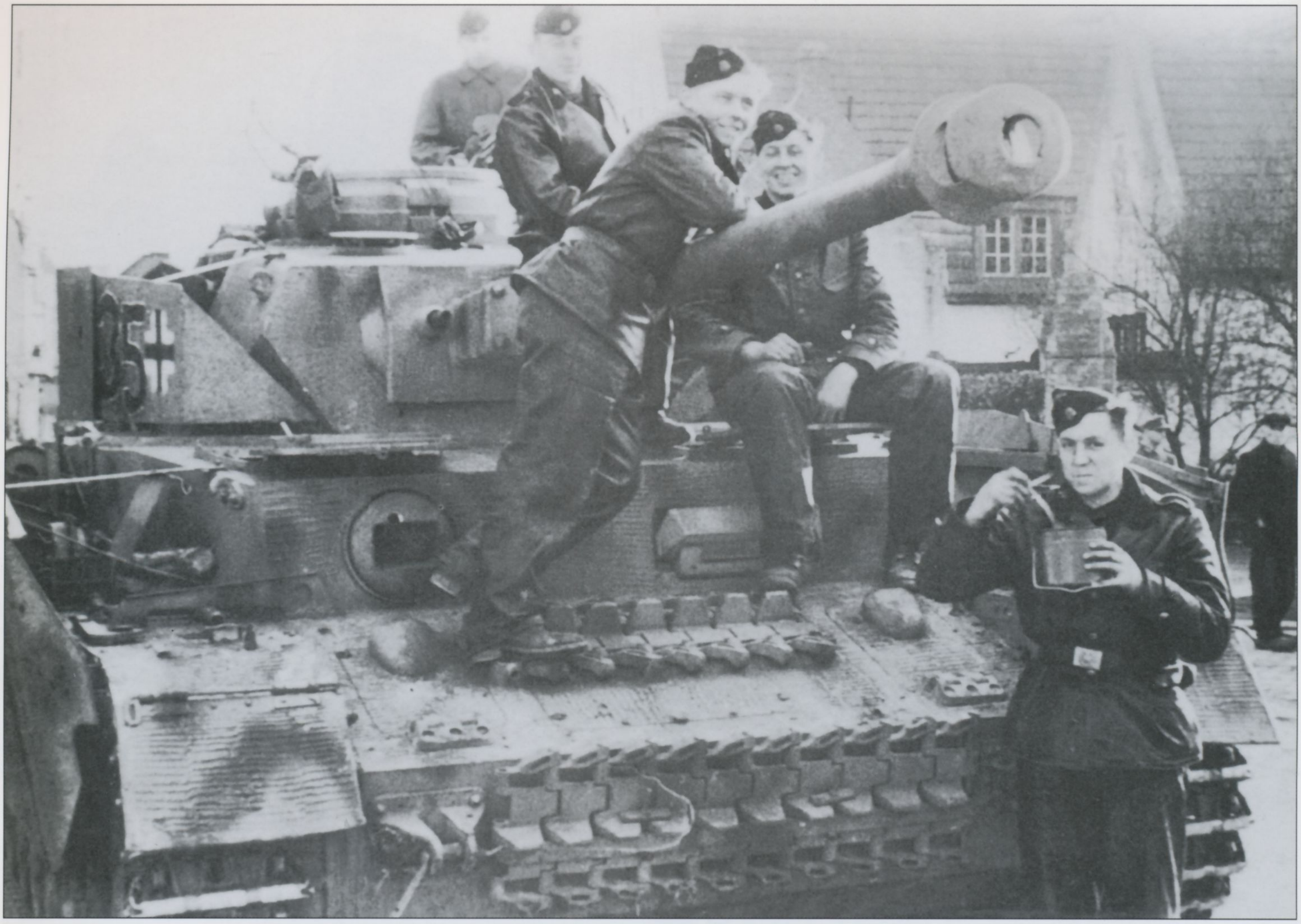
A Pz.Kpfw.IV Ausf.H from 6.Kompanie drives over a drawbridge in the area of Ostend in Belgium. The three digit tactical number '604' has been crudely painted on the turret side Schürzen in black with a white outline. Each Kompanie in II.Bataillon was equipped with 22 Pz.Kpfw.IV.



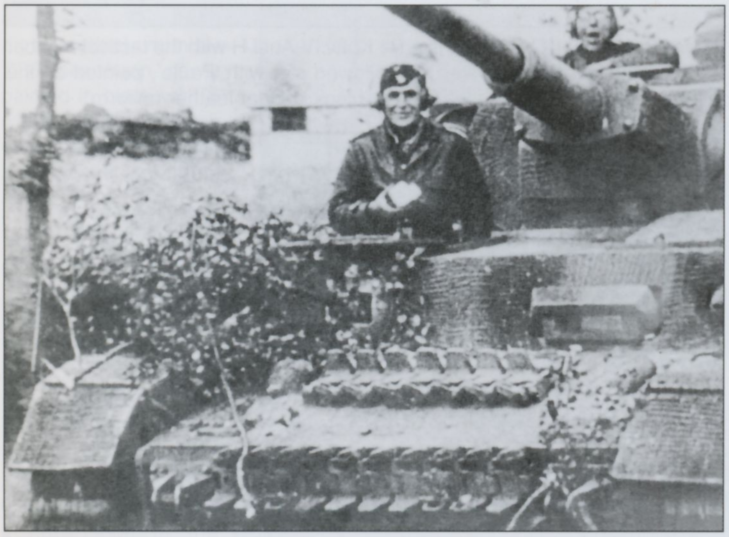
Along the march route, the Panzers of 6.Kompanie halt in a Belgian town for a rest and a meal. On the left is a Pz.Kpfw.IV Ausf.H with the tactical number '615'. The commander has painted the name of his wife or girlfriend, 'Wilma', on the cupola while the driver has followed suit with 'Paula', painted on the armored visor. This seems to have been a common practice in this company. Again, the crewmen are all wearing the black U-Boat leather uniform.



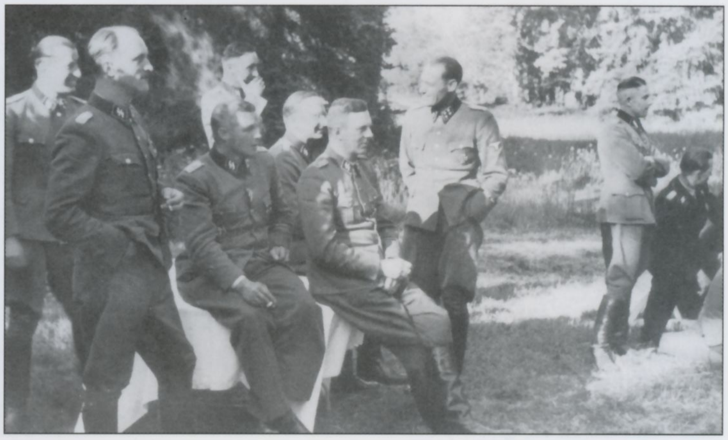
In this closeup of '615' we can see the pair of cylindrical air filters mounted on the right fender identifying the vehicle as a Pz.Kpfw.IV Ausf.H. Also note the damaged Schürzen bracket on the left side as well. It is also obvious in this photo that the camouflage paint has been applied to the spare track links mounted on the glacis plate.



The crew of '635', commanded by SS-Oberscharführer Terdenge, relax and enjoy their break, while curious civilians look on in the background. Other than the three digit tactical number and national cross, there are no other markings painted on their vehicle. The U-boat leather uniforms were popular as they also provided an extra measure of protection in case of a fire.



Another Pz.Kpfw.IV Ausf.H from an unidentified company in II.Bataillon, SS-Panzer-Regiment 12.



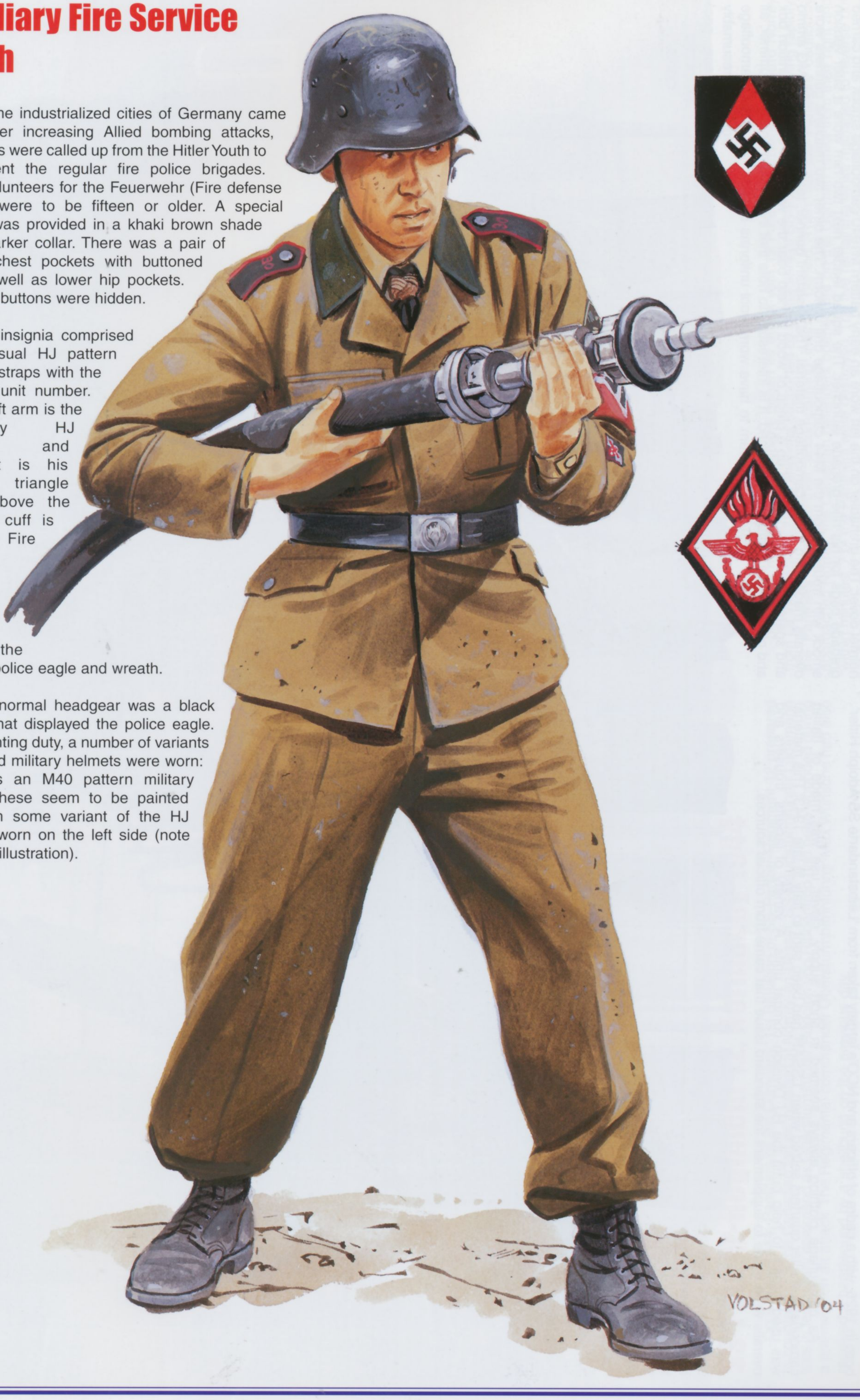
On 27 May 1944, officers of the division gathered at Tillières-sur-Avre to celebrate the 36th birthday of their commanding officer, SS-Brigadeführer Fritz Witt. When appointed commander in July 1943 at age 35, Witt became one of the youngest divisional commanders in the German armed forces. Kneeling on the ground at right is SS-Obersturmbannführer Max Wünsche, commander of SS-Panzer-Regiment 12.

Auxiliary Fire Service Youth

As the industrialized cities of Germany came under ever increasing Allied bombing attacks, volunteers were called up from the Hitler Youth to supplement the regular fire police brigades. These volunteers for the Feuerwehr (Fire defense squads) were to be fifteen or older. A special uniform was provided in a khaki brown shade with a darker collar. There was a pair of pleated chest pockets with buttoned flaps as well as lower hip pockets. The front buttons were hidden.

The insignia comprised of the usual HJ pattern shoulder straps with the Bann or unit number. On the left arm is the customary HJ armband and above it is his district triangle patch. Above the turnback cuff is the HJ Fire Defense badge (shown in detail) that features the German police eagle and wreath.

The normal headgear was a black sidecap that displayed the police eagle. On firefighting duty, a number of variants of civil and military helmets were worn: here it is an M40 pattern military helmet. These seem to be painted black with some variant of the HJ diamond worn on the left side (note the detail illustration).

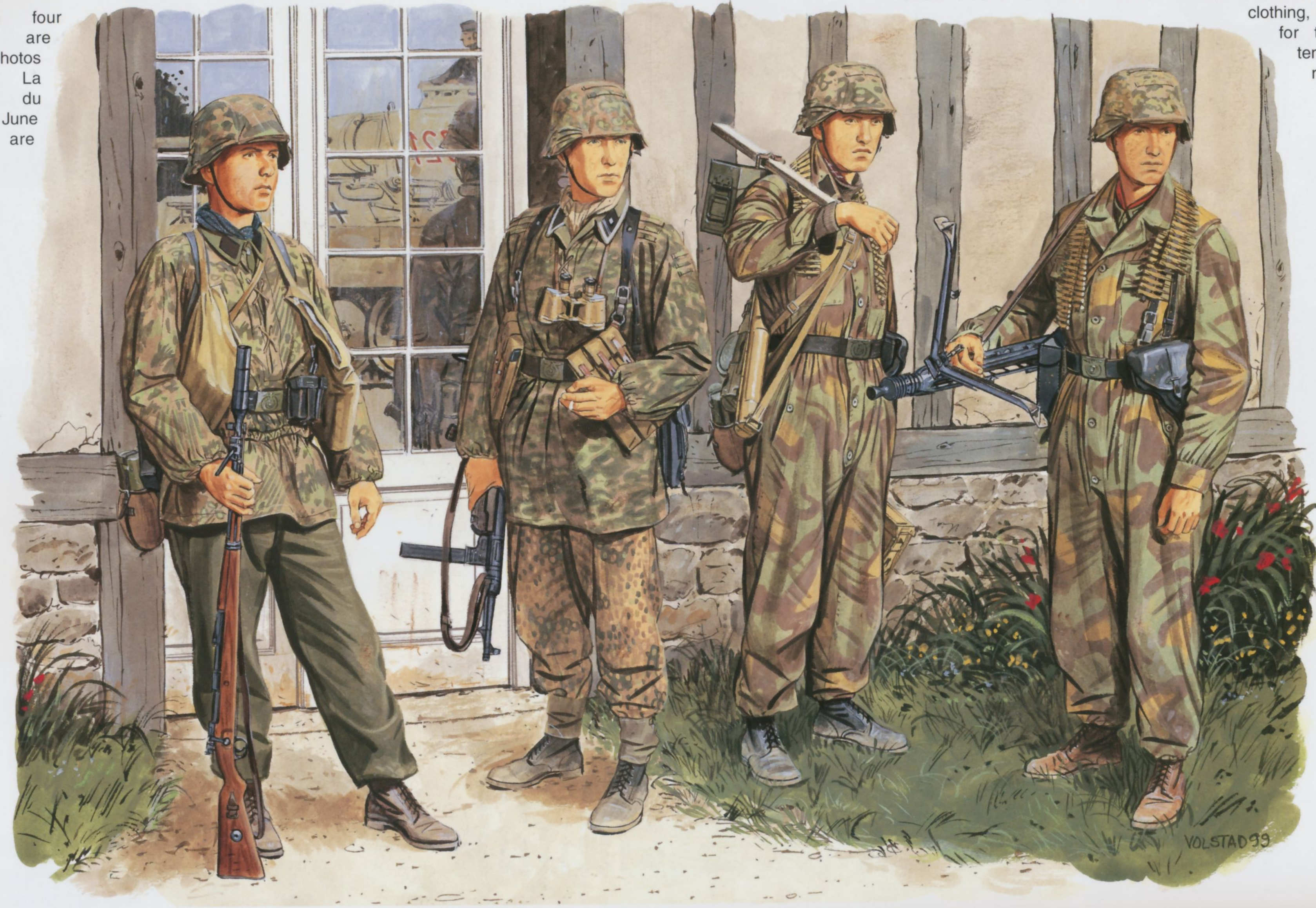


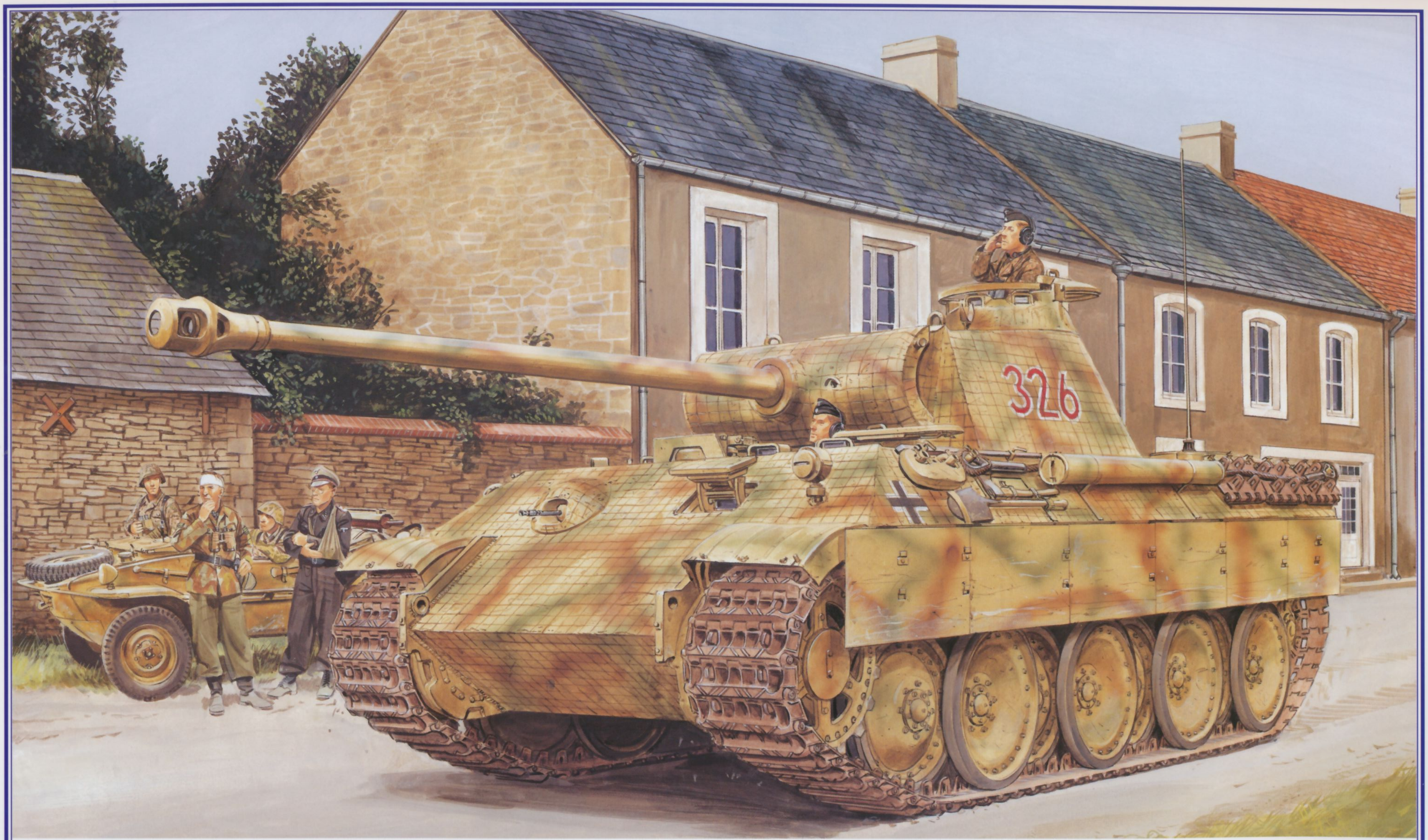
SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 25, Normandy 1944

In early 1943, 12.SS-Panzerdivision 'Hitlerjugend' was formed from volunteer HJ members born in 1926, with a cadre of officers and NCO's largely taken from 'Leibstandarte SS Adolph Hitler'.

As camouflage clothing always seemed in short supply, clever use was made of Italian camouflage shelter quarters seized when 'LSSAH' had been sent to Italy in late 1943. This material was used largely to help outfit the HJ Division combat units. A variety of jackets, trousers and overalls were made to supplement the standard issue that came from official sources.

These four soldiers are based on photos taken at La Villeneuve du Rots on 9 June 1944 and are quite representative of the mix of uniforms worn during the Normandy. All wore a standard issue helmet cover. The grenadier on the left wore an early pattern M1940 camouflage smock and carried grenade bags for his rifle-grenade launcher. The squad leader next two him wore a later version smock with trousers from the M44 camouflage drill uniform. The other two machine gunners wore overalls made from Italian camouflage material. The assistant gunner, loaded down with MG ammo and spare barrels, had picked up a piece of wood to help bear the weight of one ammunition box and other than a pistol, was unarmed. It is interesting to note that even in the height of summer, all seem to have worn wool uniforms beneath the cotton camouflage clothing, presumably for those cool temperate nights.





SS-Panzer-Regiment 12, Normandy 1944

On 9 June 1944, Panthers of 3rd Company, 1st Battalion of SS-Panzer-Regiment 12 prepared to counterattack the Canadian forces installed at Norrey-en-Bessin. SS-Haupsturmführer Ludemann was in temporary command as Obersturmführer Rudolph von Ribbentrop had been wounded during a pre-invasion air attack. The Regimental commander Obersturmbannführer Max Wunsche had also received a headwound by a shellburst on the previous day.

Ribbentrop and Wunsche had served long with 'LSSAH' before joining HJ Division. Ribbentrop wore black lightweight two piece coveralls that were issued to SS-Flak crewmen. Wunsche wore a jacket made from Italian camouflage material and standard field gray trousers.

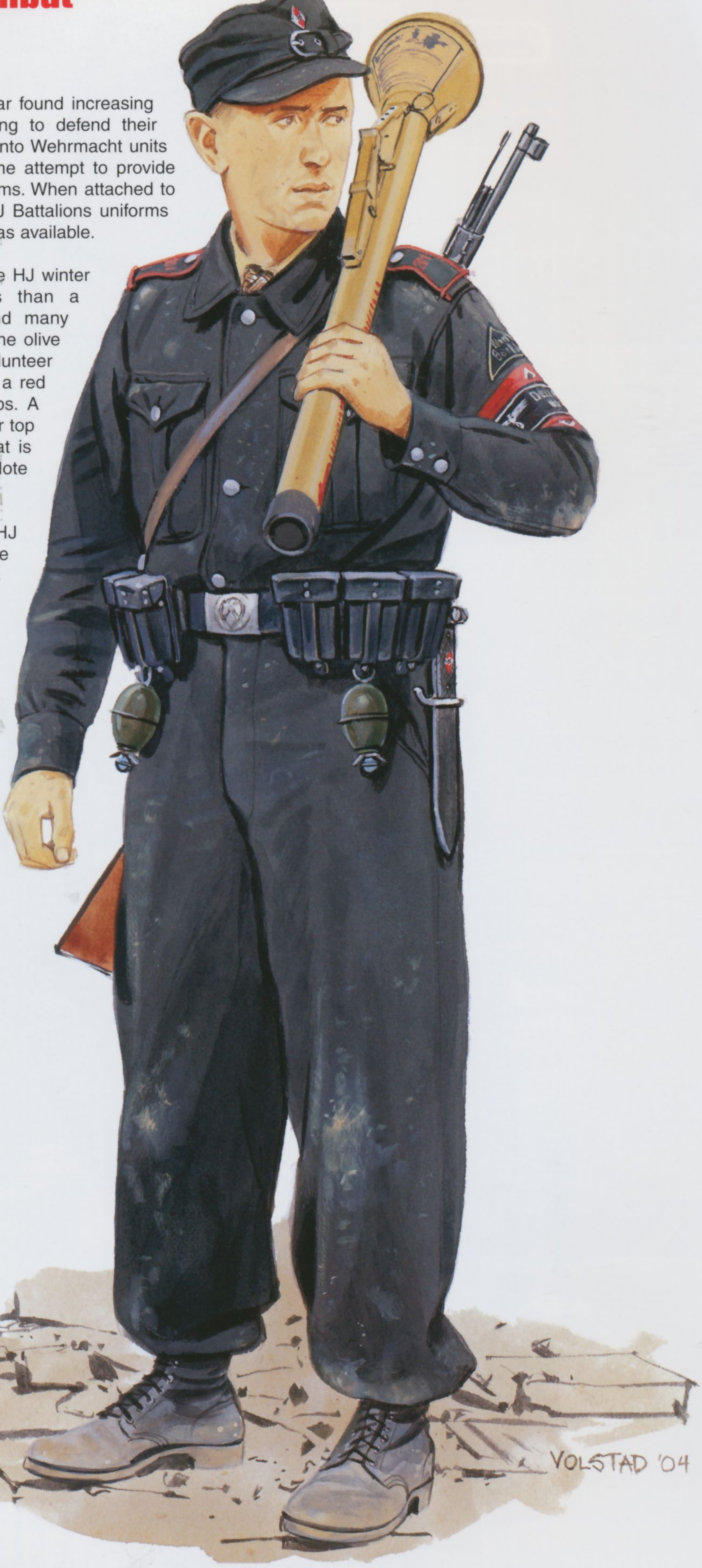
Just after midday 3rd Company began its attack with 12 Panthers, advancing toward Norrey from La Villeneuve du Rots and was supported by grenadiers of SS-Pz.GrenRgt.25. Moving rapidly, the Panthers soon left their accompanying infantry behind. Then, as the Panthers cautiously approached Norrey, the Canadian defenders opened fire on the German tanks from their right and within minutes, 7 of the Panthers were destroyed. The five remaining tanks managed to reverse out of danger. Some of the surviving crewmen, some injured or burned, also managed to return their lines. Panther '326' survived the battle, but its commander did not.

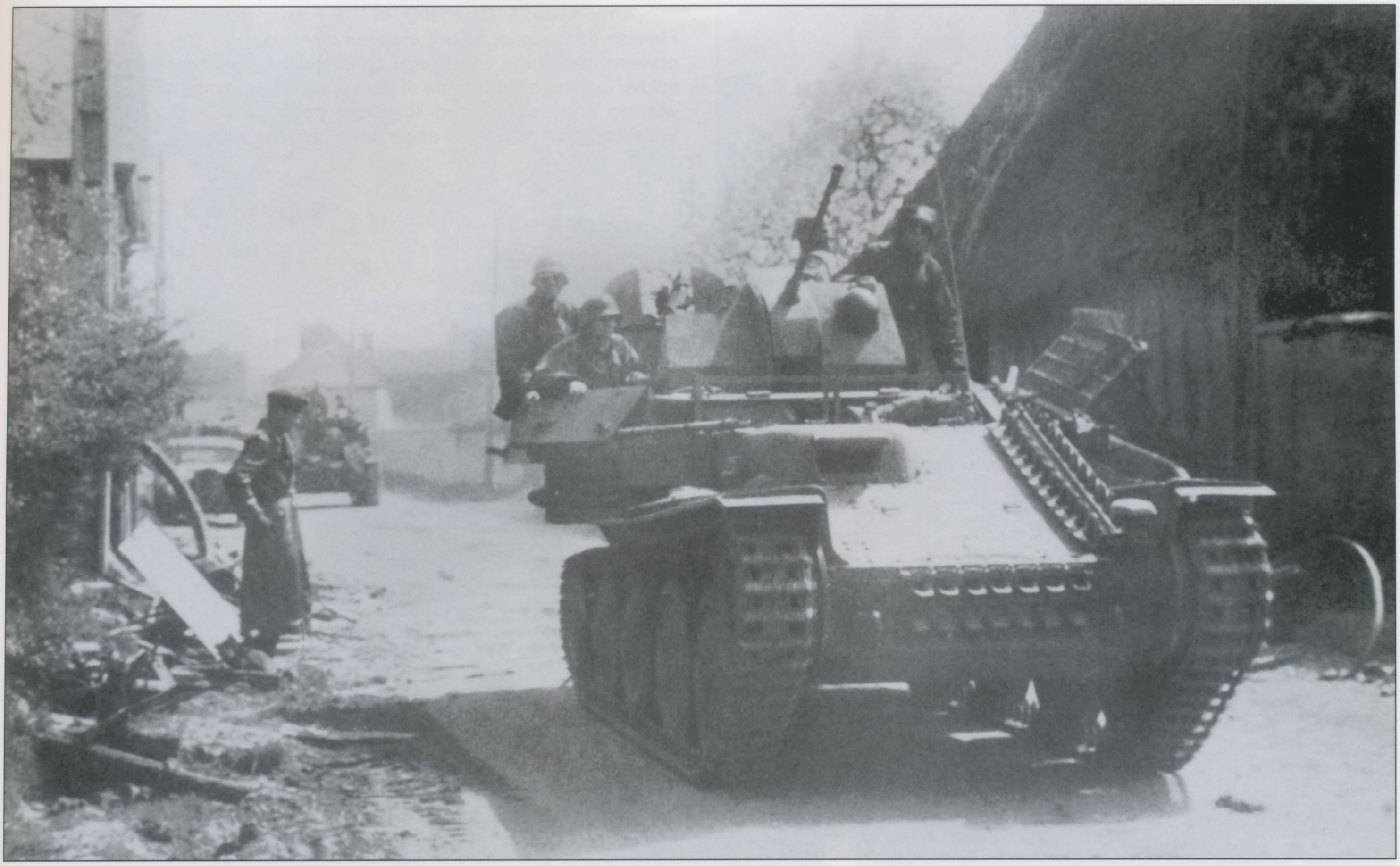
Hitler Youth Combat Volunteer

The final months of the war found increasing numbers of the HJ volunteering to defend their homeland. Some were drafted into Wehrmacht units where there was generally some attempt to provide them with proper military uniforms. When attached to Volksturm units or their own HJ Battalions uniforms became a matter of whatever was available.

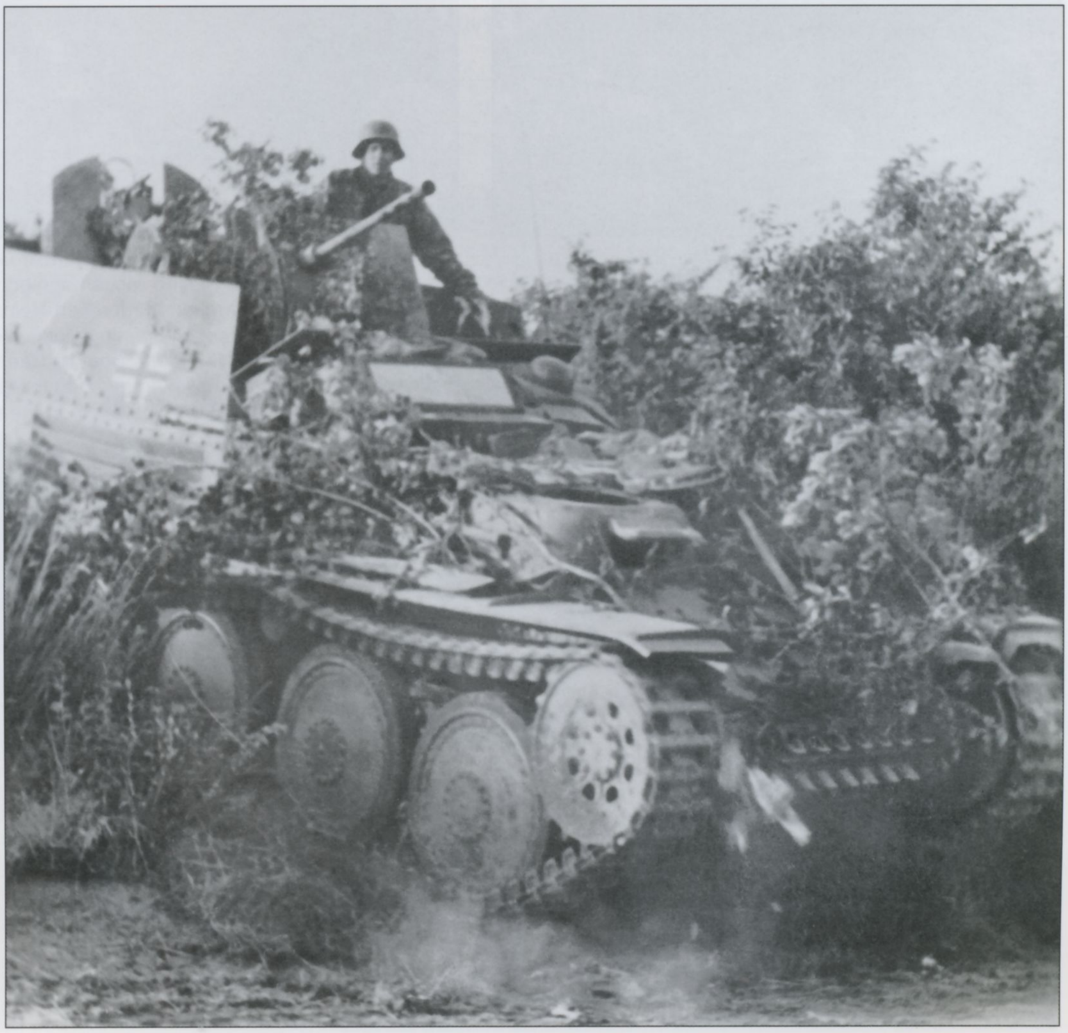
The dark blue shade of the HJ winter uniform was somewhat less than a suitable camouflage color and many would have preferred to wear the olive brown HJ service tunic. This volunteer displays this status by wearing a red cord around his shoulder straps. A Volksturm armband is worn over top his HJ armband and above that is worn the black district badge. Note the HJ badge worn on his cap.

For the most part, HJ volunteers were deployed in the infantry or anti-tank role. It was not uncommon for these ad hoc late war units to be short of weapons and equipment, but this youth has managed to acquire a Kar 98k rifle with ammunition pouches, M39 egg grenades and a Panzerfaust 100m. The HJ Knife still is retained.

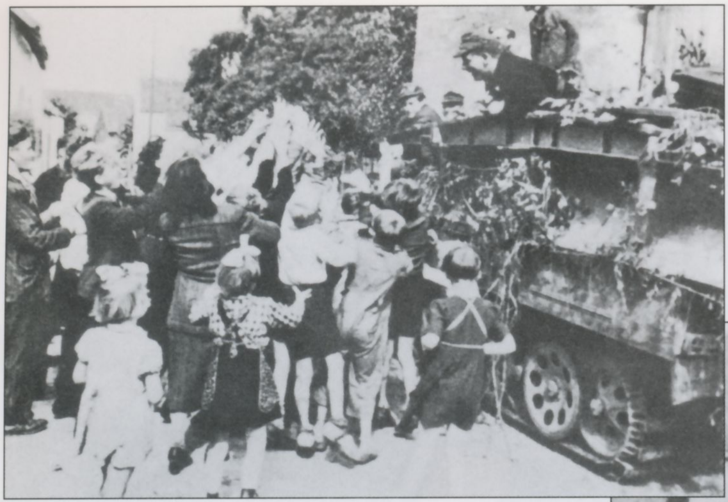




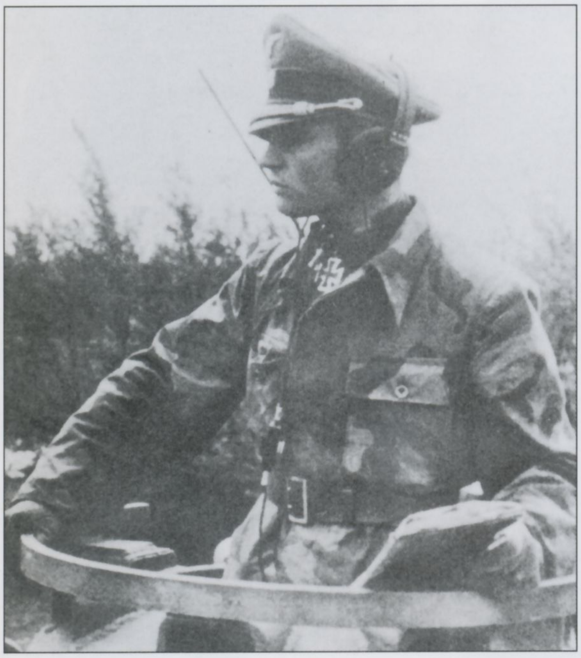
A column of 2cm Flakpanzer 38(t) Ausf.L (Sd.Kfz.140) from SS-Flak-Abteilung 12 in the Caen area, early June 1944. There were 140 of these Flakpanzers built on the chassis of the obsolete Pz.Kpfw.38(t) from November 1943 to February 1944, armed with the 2cm FlaK38 anti-aircraft gun. They were issued to the Panzer divisions in January and February 1944, including eight to SS-Flak-Abteilung 12.



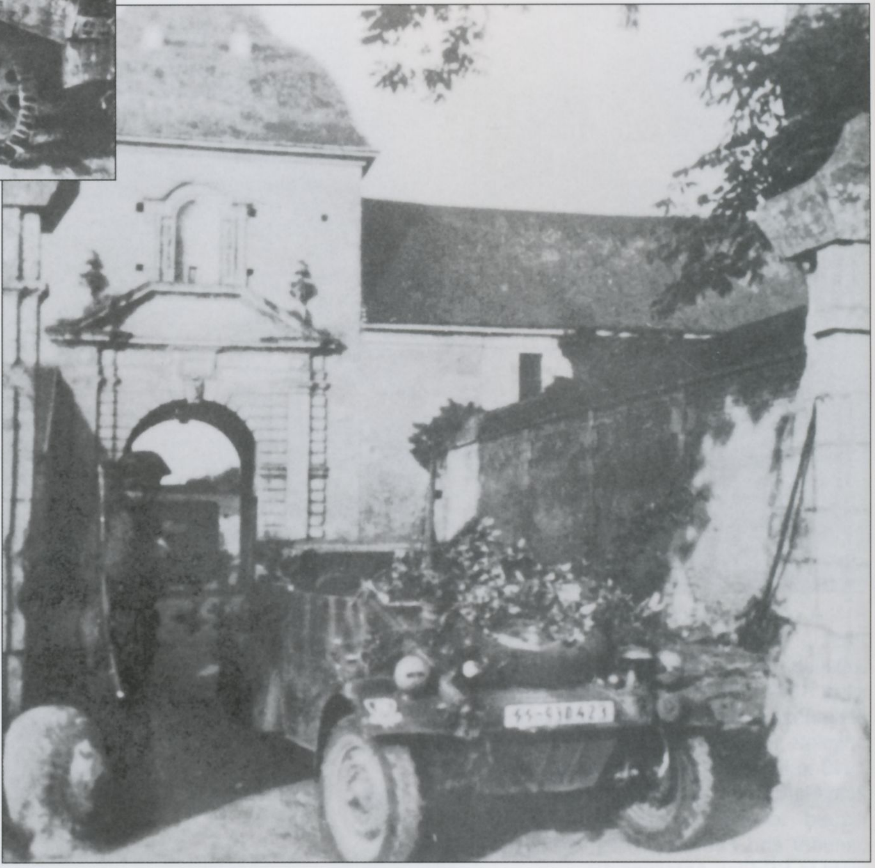
Another 2cm Flakpanzer 38(t) Ausf.L drives out of a field and onto a road. The hinged armor shields are raised up revealing a national cross that is painted on the side of the plates. (M. Bayerl)



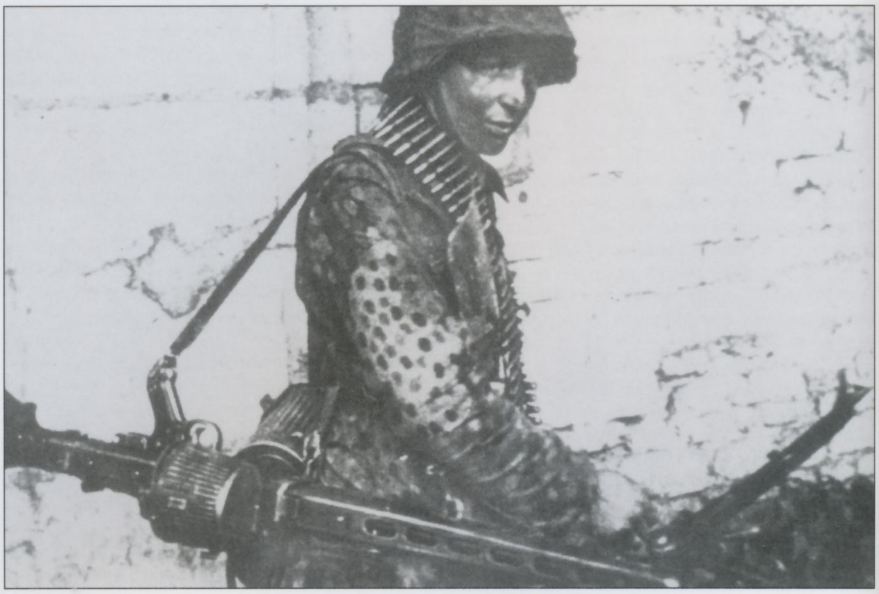
An Sd.Kfz.251/7 Ausf.D of SS-Panzer-Pioniere-Bataillon 12 in a Flemish village prior to the invasion of Normandy. The crew has liberally covered the vehicle with foliage as camouflage against Allied fighters. The soldier leaning over the side of the vehicle is wearing a black panzer jacket with an army style piped Totenkopf collar patch. His field-gray M1943 Einheitsmütze has the SS eagle sewn onto the left side.



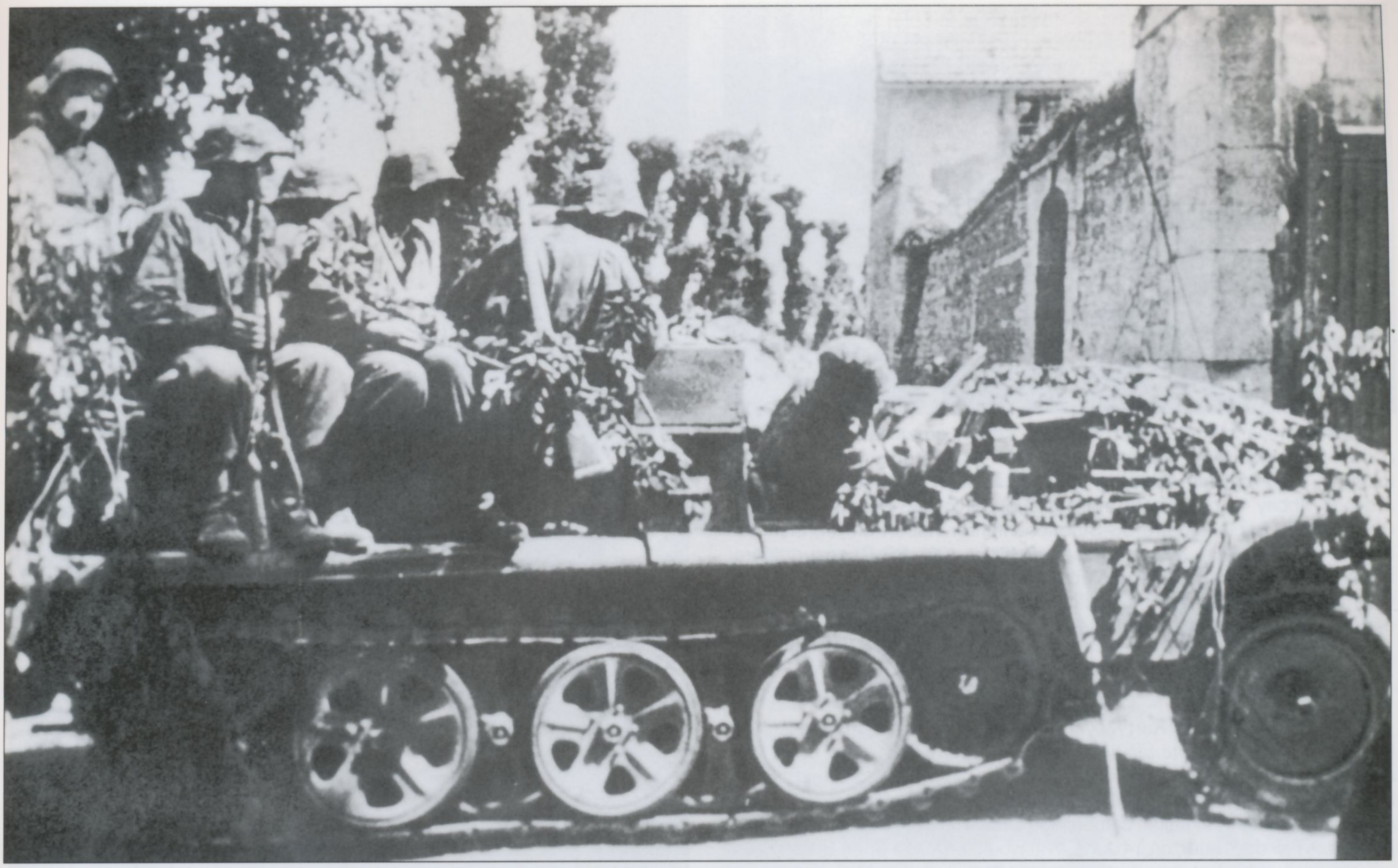
SS-Obersturmbannführer Max Wünsche, commander of SS-Panzer-Regiment 12, in the turret of his Panther on 7 June 1944. The Allied invasion of France had begun early on the morning of 6 June but it was the middle of the afternoon before 12.SS-Panzer-Division 'Hitlerjugend' finally was released by OKW for deployment with Seventh Army. Here, Wünsche is seen wearing a tunic custom made from Italian camouflage material. He was awarded the Knights Cross on 28 February 1943 while commander of I.Bataillon, SS-Panzer-Regiment 1 of SS-Panzer-Grendadier-Division 'LSSAH' in Russia.



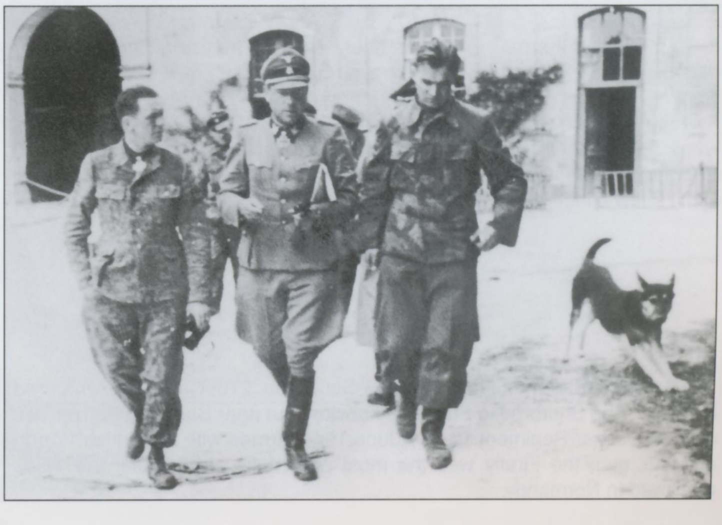
During the night of 6-7 June, SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 25, commanded by SS-Standartenführer Kurt Meyer, accompanied by II.Bataillon SS-Panzer-Regiment 12, commanded by SS-Sturmbannführer Karl-Heinz Prinz, marched toward the invasion front, arriving west of Caen around noon on 7 June. Meyer set up his command post at the ancient Ardenne Abbey, a few kilometers west of Caen. Here, a Kübelwagen from the regimental headquarters, sits in the north entrance to the abbey compound guarded by a sentry on the left. The divisional emblem can be seen on the right mudguard.



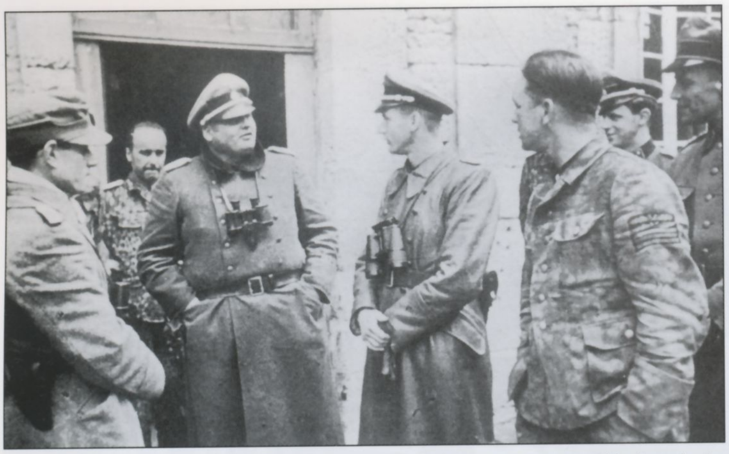
A young SS-Panzer-Grenadier armed with an MG 42 standing at the same gate. He is wearing the new M44 two-piece camouflage drill uniform introduced on 1 March 1944.



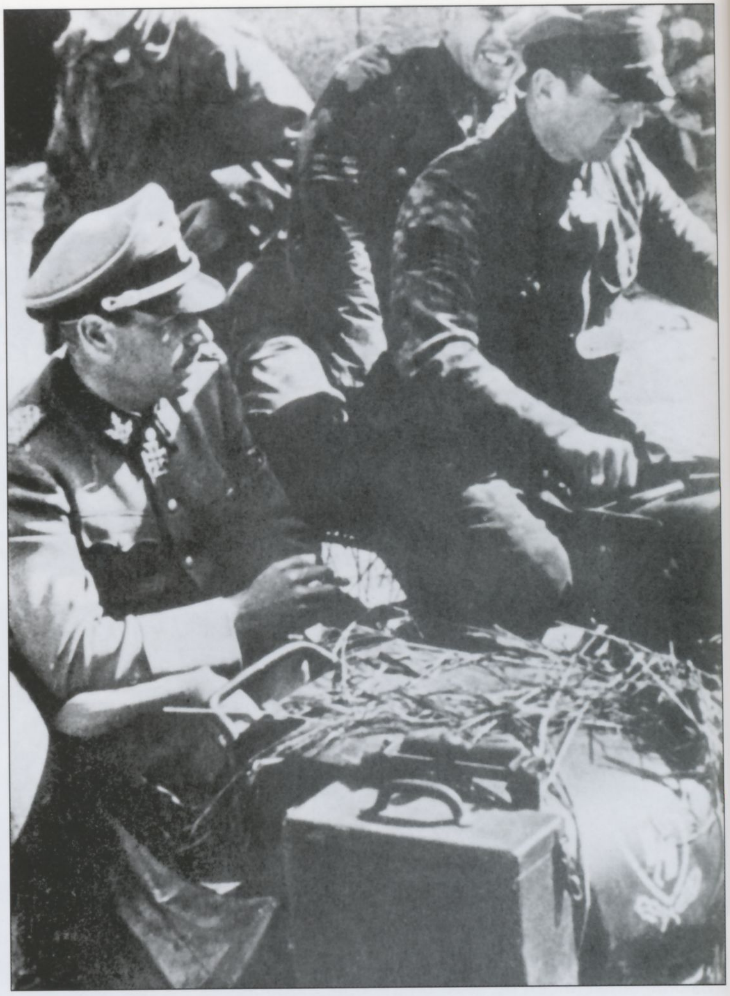
Three photos showing a 15cm sIG33 from 13.Kompanie, SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 25 being towed into the abbey compound by an Sd.Kfz.10 half-track prime mover. Each battalion in SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 25 and 26 were equipped with a battery of six towed 15cm sIG33 howitzers. The divisional emblem can be seen on the right mudguard of the half-track.



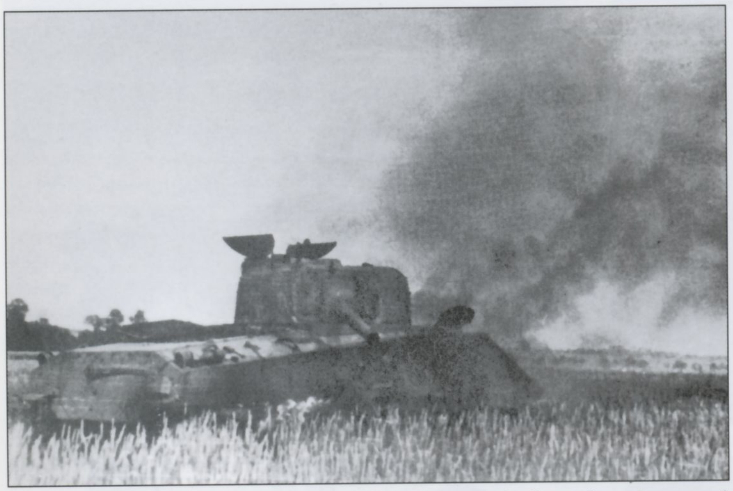
SS-Standartenführer Kurt Meyer, SS-Brigadeführer Fritz Witt and SS-Obersturmbannführer Max Wünsche confer in the courtyard of the Ardenne Abbey shortly after the invasion. Meyer is wearing the new M44 two-piece camouflage drill uniform while Wünsche is wearing his custom made tunic in Italian camouflage cloth with his black uniform trousers.



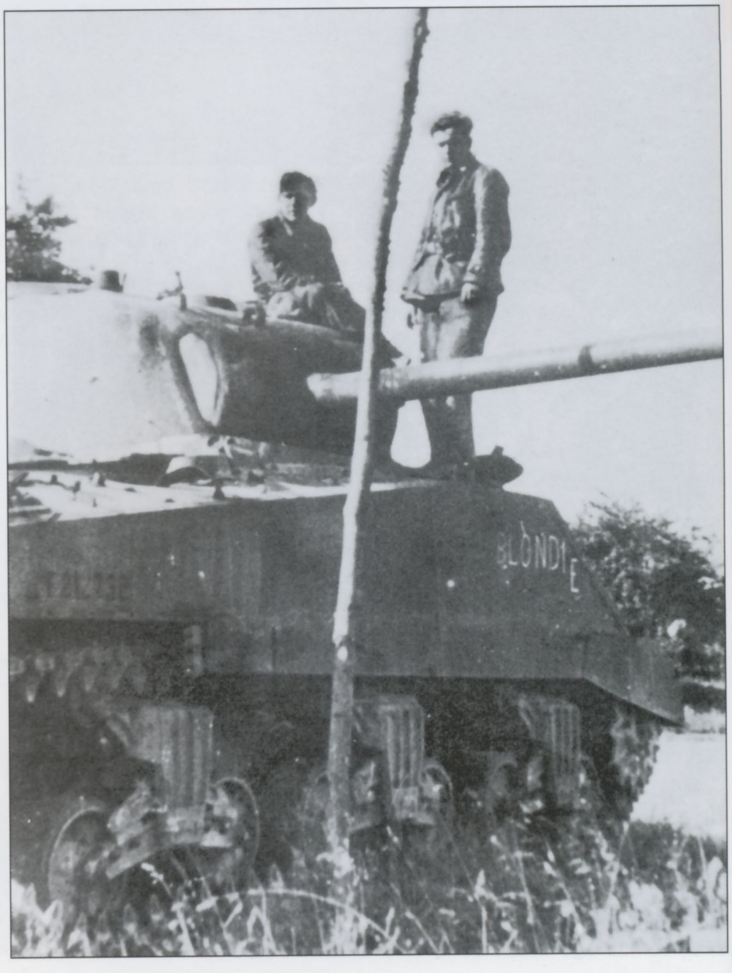
SS-Sturmbannführer Franz Steineck (left in greatcoat with hands in pockets and binoculars), commander of 1.SS-Panzer-Korps medium artillery battalion, s.SS-Artillerie-Abteilung 101, visits Meyer's headquarters at the Ardenne Abbey to coordinate artillery support for SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 25. To his left, are SS-Sturmbannführer Hubert Meyer, then SS-Standartenführer Kurt Meyer, Ordonnanoffizier (03) SS-Obersturmführer Bernhard Meitzel and SS-Hauptsturmführer Günter Reichenbach. Meyer's M44 two-piece camouflage drill uniform has the green on black rank patch designed for use on the camouflage uniform and worn on both sleeves.



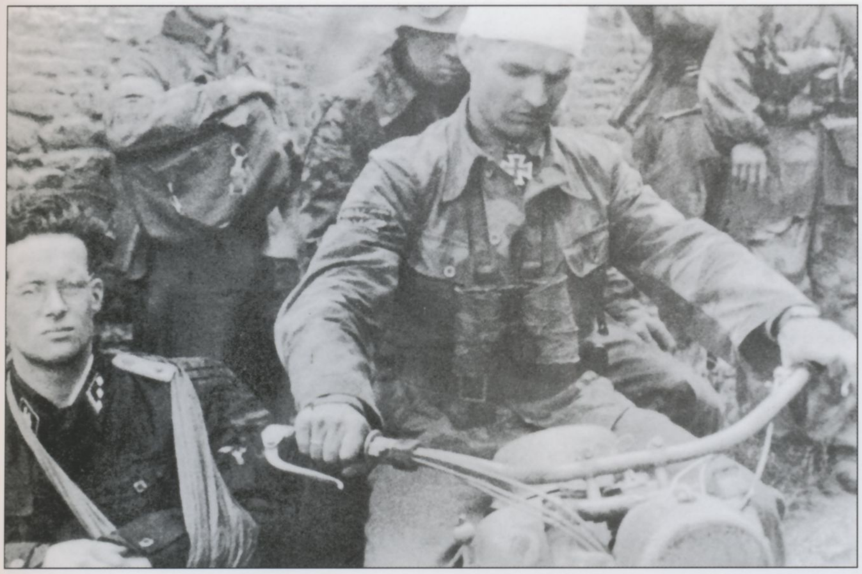
SS-Standartenführer Kurt Meyer drives the divisional commander, SS-Brigadeführer Fritz Witt, to his headquarters in the sidecar of a BMW R75 motorcycle in early June 1944. Climbing on to the pilion seat is the regimental medical officer, SS-Sturmbannführer Dr. Erich Gatternig, wearing a custom made tunic in Italian camouflage cloth with the green on black rank patches. A few days later, on 14 June, Witt would be killed when British naval vessels shelled his headquarters at Venoix. The next day, Meyer took over command, becoming the youngest divisional commander in the German armed forces.



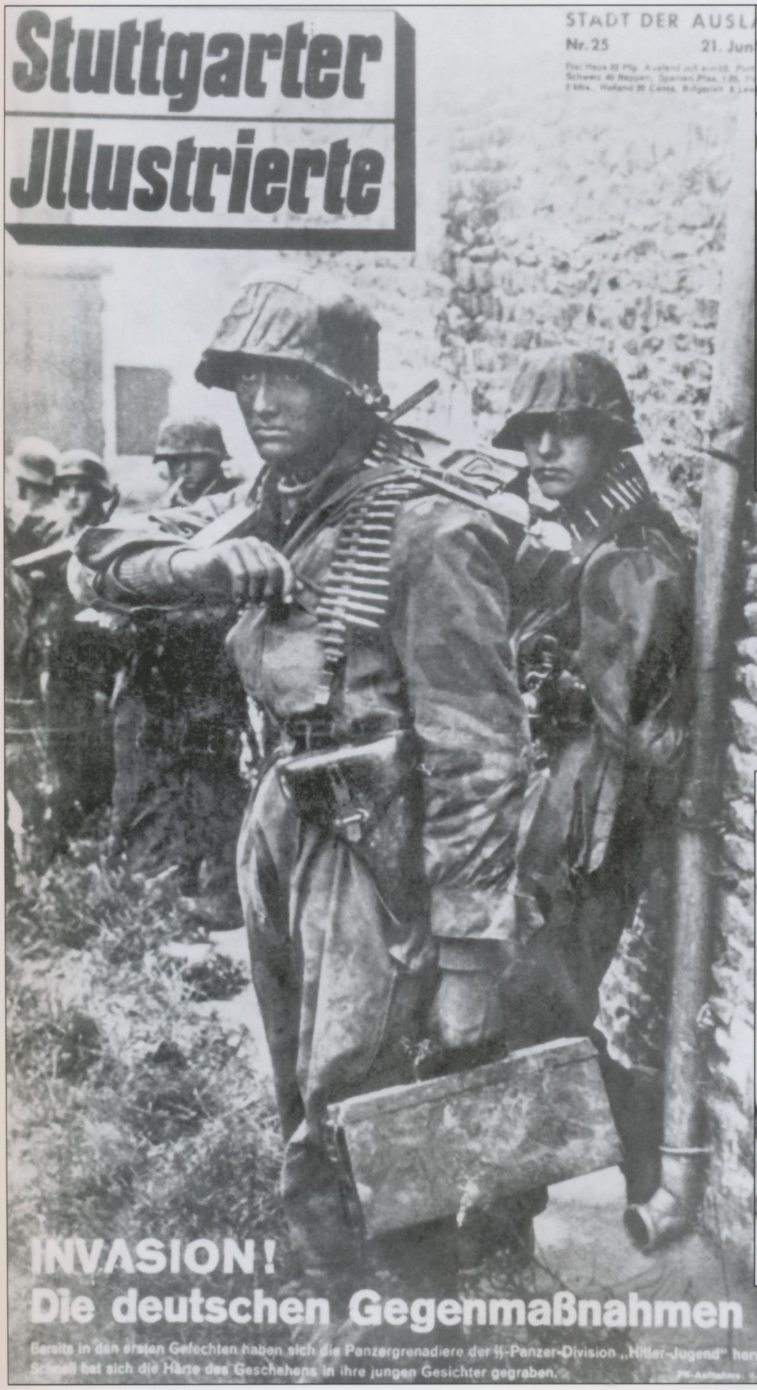
An M4A2 Sherman tank, probably from 27th Canadian Armoured Regiment (the Sherbrooke Fusiliers), burns near Authie on 7 June 1944. From his vantage point high in the Ardenne Abbey, Kurt Meyer was able to view the advance of the Canadian tanks towards Authie and ordered Max Wünsche to direct an attack against them. The Panzer IV's of 5. and 6.Kompanie/SS-Panzer-Regiment 12 caught the Canadians by surprise and within a few minutes, more than a dozen Shermans were burning.



An M4A4 Sherman Firefly Vc of 'B' Squadron, 27th Canadian Armoured Regiment (the Sherbrooke Fusiliers) knocked out near Buron by Panzer IV's of II./SS-Panzer-Regiment 12 on 7 June 1944. Armed with the British 17 pdr. anti-tank gun, the Firefly was the most powerfully armed tank the Allies employed in Normandy.



In the early afternoon of 9 June, twelve Panthers from 3.Kompanie, SS-Panzer-Regiment 12 attacked towards Norrey-en-Bessin where they were ambushed by Sherman 17-pounder Fireflies from the 2nd Canadian Brigade (the Elgin Regiment) that were being delivered to the 10th Canadian Armoured Regiment (the Fort Garry Horse) at Bretteville. In moments, seven of the Panthers were knocked out. Here, the company commander, SS-Obersturmführer Rudolf von Ribbentrop and the regimental commander, SS-Obersturmbannführer Max Wünsche are seen riding in a Zündapp KS750 motorcycle after witnessing the destruction of their armor. Ribbentrop did not take part in the attack as he had been wounded in a fighter attack a few days before D-Day and Wünsche had been wounded in the head by shrapnel on 7 June.



Stuttgarter Jllustrierte

STADT DER AUSL

Nr. 25

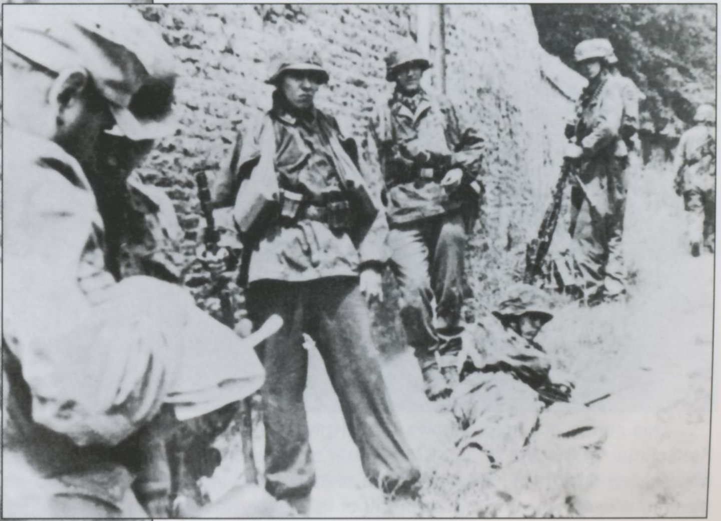
21. Jun

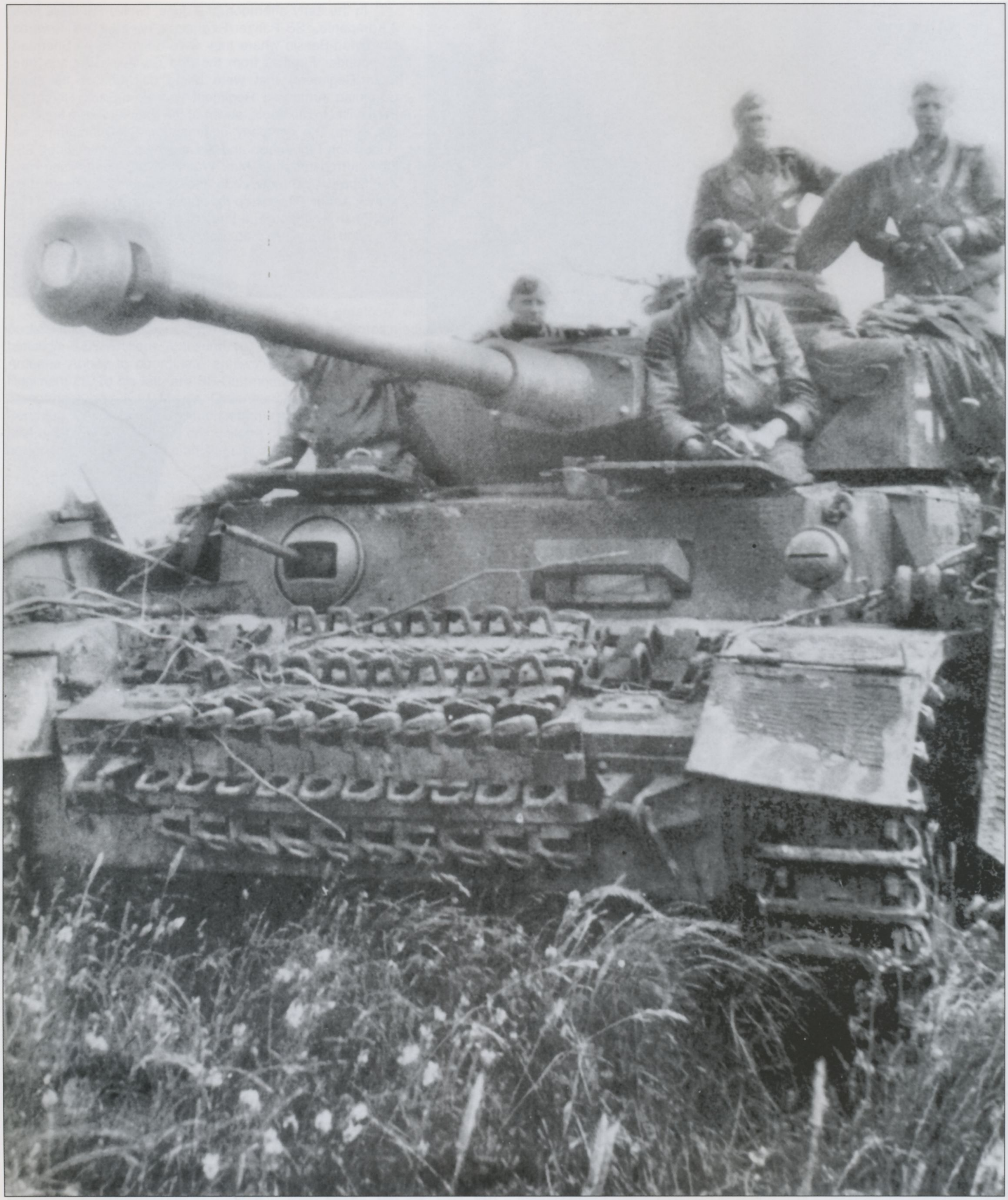
INVASION!

Die deutschen Gegenmaßnahmen laufen!

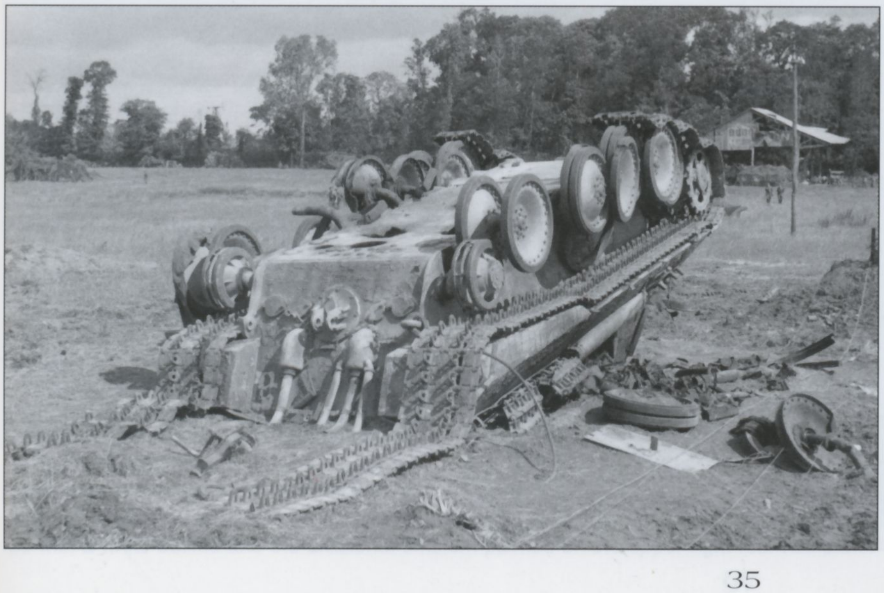
Bereits in den ersten Gefechten haben sich die Panzergrenadiere der ϟϟ-Panzer-Division „Hitler-Jugend" hervorragend geschlagen. Schnell hat sich die Härte des Geschehens in ihre jungen Gesichter gegraben.

Three photos of men from 15.Kompanie of I.Bataillon, SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 25 at La Villeneuve du Rots, who were to follow up the attack on Norrey-en-Bessin by the Panthers of 3.Kompanie. At left in the last photo is SS-Sturmbannführer Bernhard Krause, commander of I./SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 26, who was accompanied here by von Ribbentrop and Wünsche. Krause is wearing a custom made uniform tunic and matching Einheitsmütze in Italian camouflage cloth.

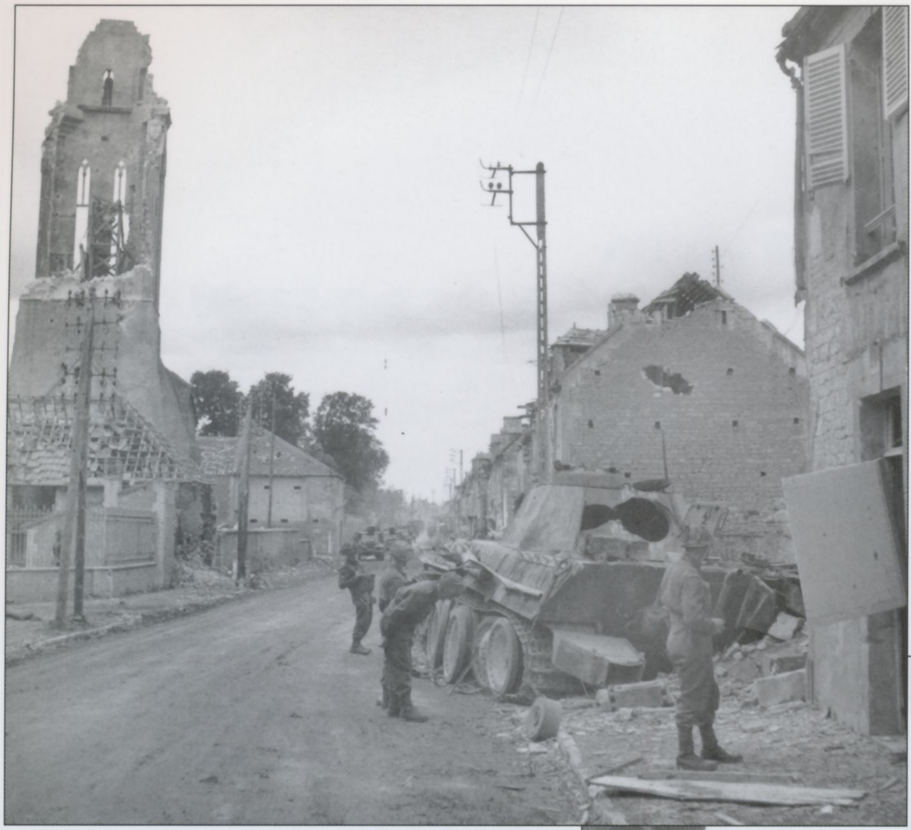




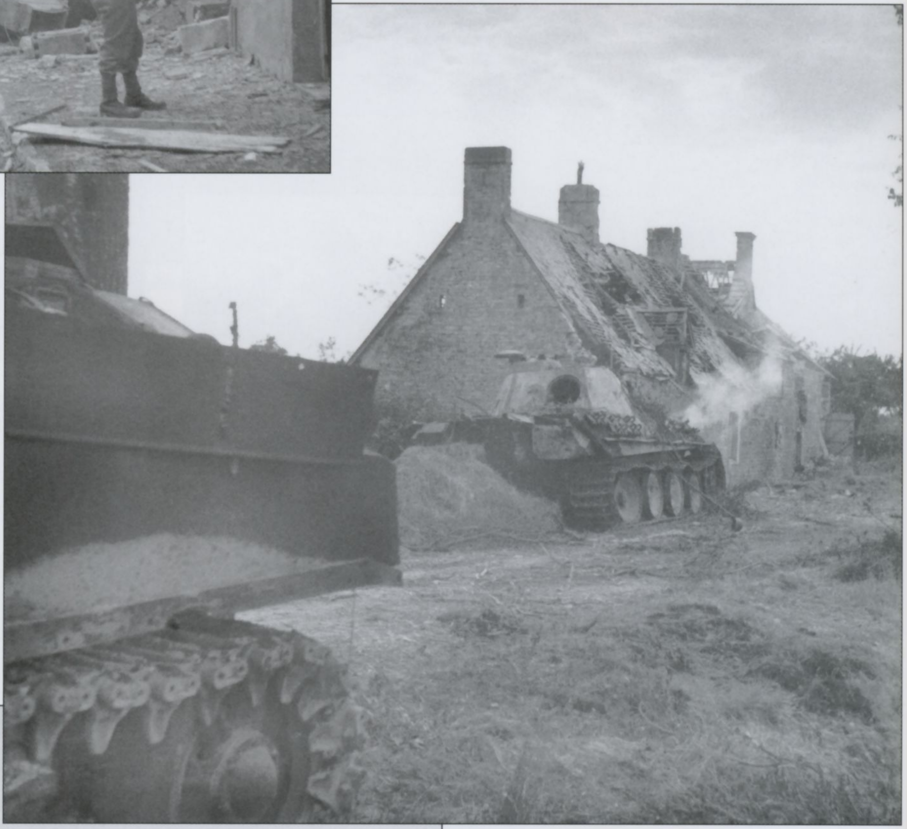
This series of photos shows a Pz.Kpfw.IV Ausf.H from 5./SS-Panzer-Regiment 12, tactical number '536', commanded by SS-Unterscharführer Willy Kretschmar. In the first photo, Kretschmar and his crew have just arrived at their position west of Caen on 7 June 1944. At this time, the Panzer still had its hull Schürzen in place, except for one piece on the left side that can be seen to be missing in another photo. In the next photo, we see it sitting in a field covered with tall grass but missing all of its Schürzen. On 7 June, the first day of battle, an artillery round landed beside the Panzer, damaging one of the roadwheel mounts and disabling it for a day and a half until the workshop company could repair it. In this next photo, SS-Unterscharführer Kretschmar can be seen kneeling beside the damaged wheel. In the last photo, a proud Kretschmar and crew pose in front of their Panzer after attacking Hill 112 near Baron on 28 June 1944, holding up the advance of the British 11th Armoured Division. The newly painted kill rings on the barrel indicate that they destroyed fifteen British and Canadian tanks.



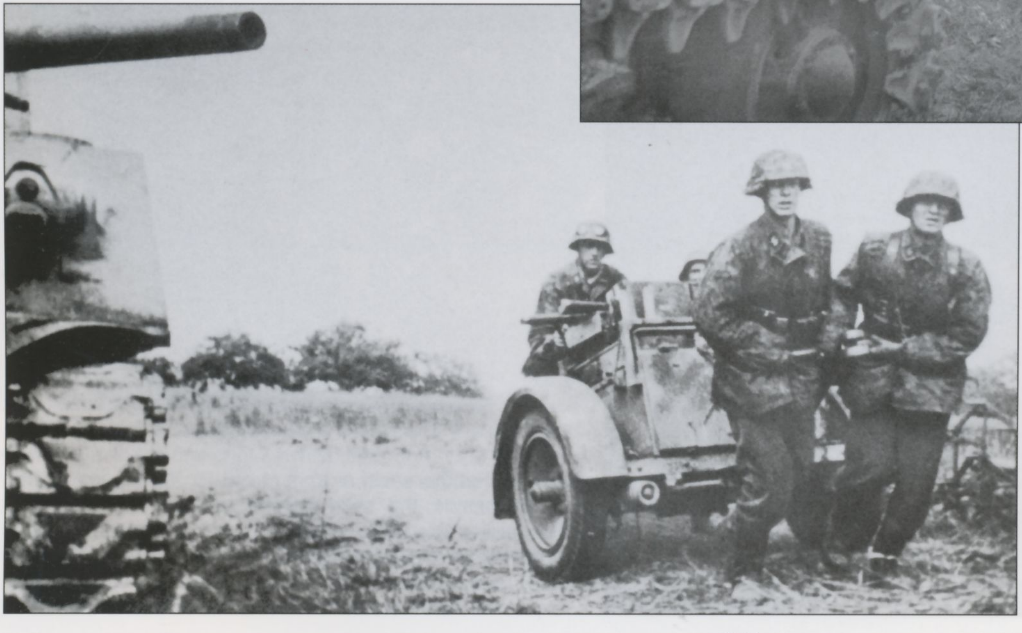
A Panther Ausf.A from 1./SS-Pz.Rgt.12 lies upside down beside the road between Norrey-en-Bessin and Bretteville-l'Orgueilleuse where it was overturned by Allied engineers to clear the road. An anti-tank gun knocked it out on 8 June 1944 but most of the damage was caused when explosive trials were conducted on the hulk at a later date.



Canadian troops examine the wreckage of a Panther Ausf.G from 4./SS-Pz.Rgt.12 destroyed by a PIAT bomb in Bretteville-l'Orgueilleuse during a night attack on 8 June 1944. The damage to the rear of the turret was caused when another Panther following fired into it in the confusion of battle. This photo was taken around 20 June 1944.



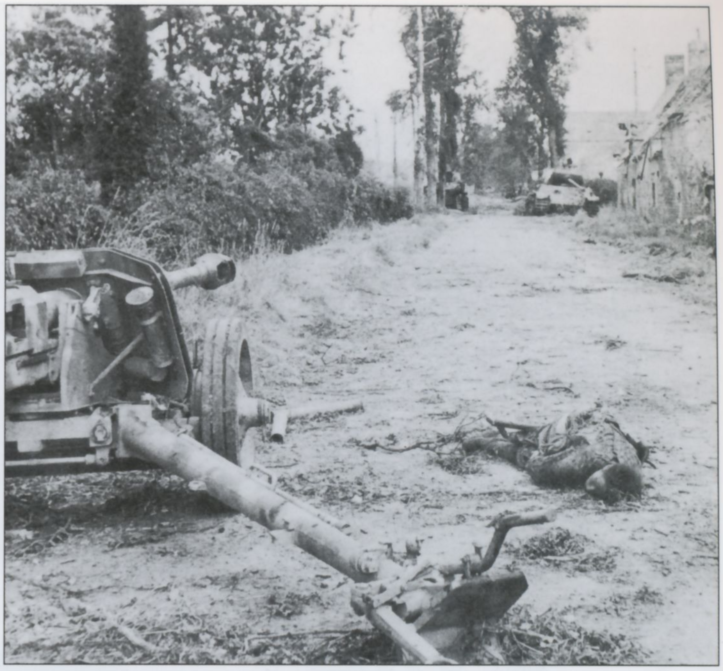
Another view of the smoldering Panther Ausf.G with the rear of the knocked out Sherman in the foreground.



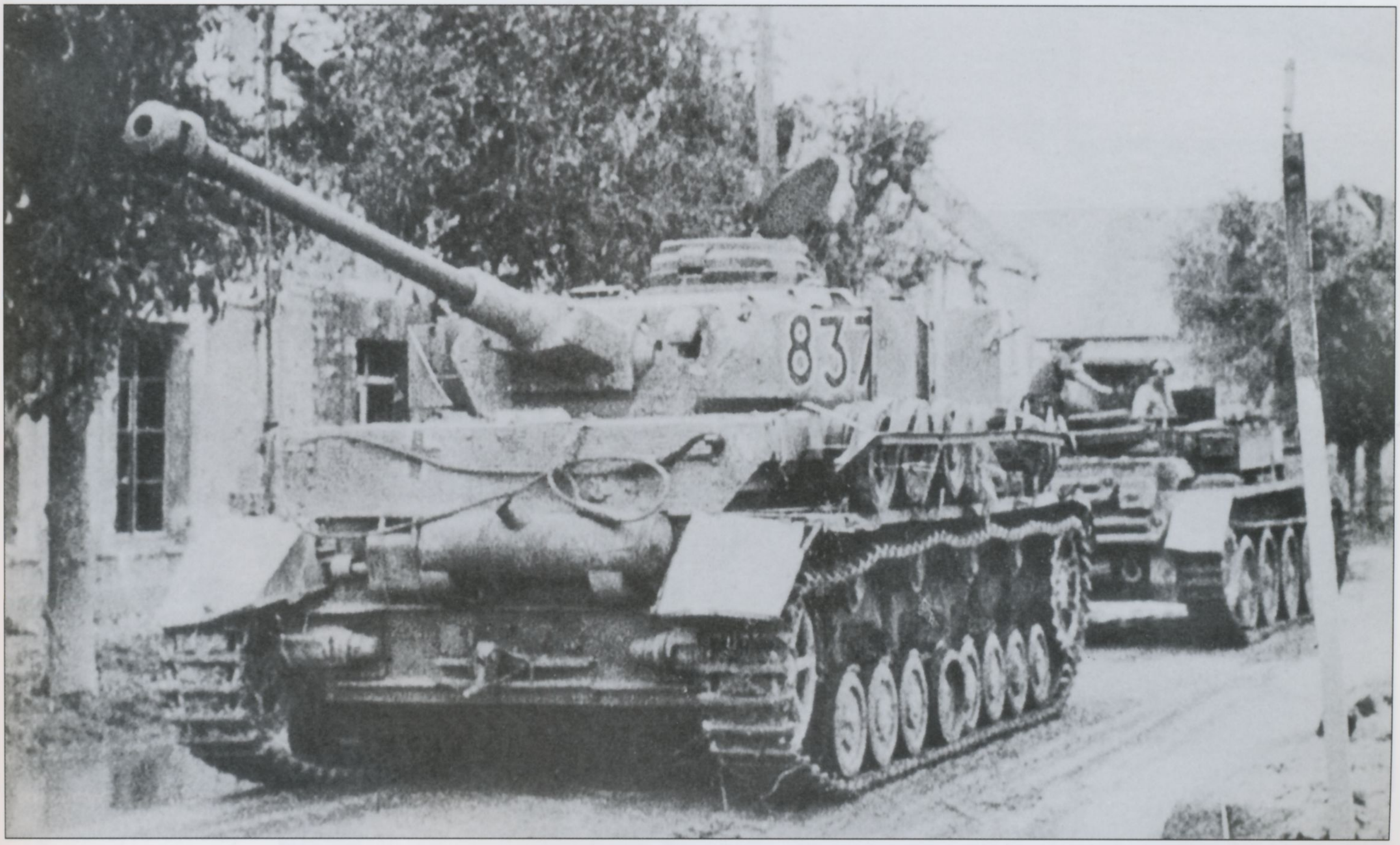
Artillerymen from SS-Artillerie-Regiment 12 manhandle an ammunition trailer past a knocked out M4A4 Sherman, probably from the 27th Canadian Armoured Regiment (the Sherbrooke Fusiliers) near Authie. On 7 June, the Sherbrooke Fusiliers lost fifteen Shermans when they were taken by surprise in the flank by Panzer IV's of 5. and 8.Kompanie of SS-Panzer-Regiment 12.

SS-Sturmbannführer Erich Olboeter, commander of III.Bataillon SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 26, was awarded the Knights Cross on 27 July 1944. III.Bataillon received it's baptism of fire on 7 June when they stormed Brouay to close the gap between II.Bataillon and 15.Aufklärungs-Kompanie. Much to their surprise, they encountered a small force from Panzer-Lehr-Division occupying positions along the railway bank. Olboeter was killed in action on 2 September 1944.

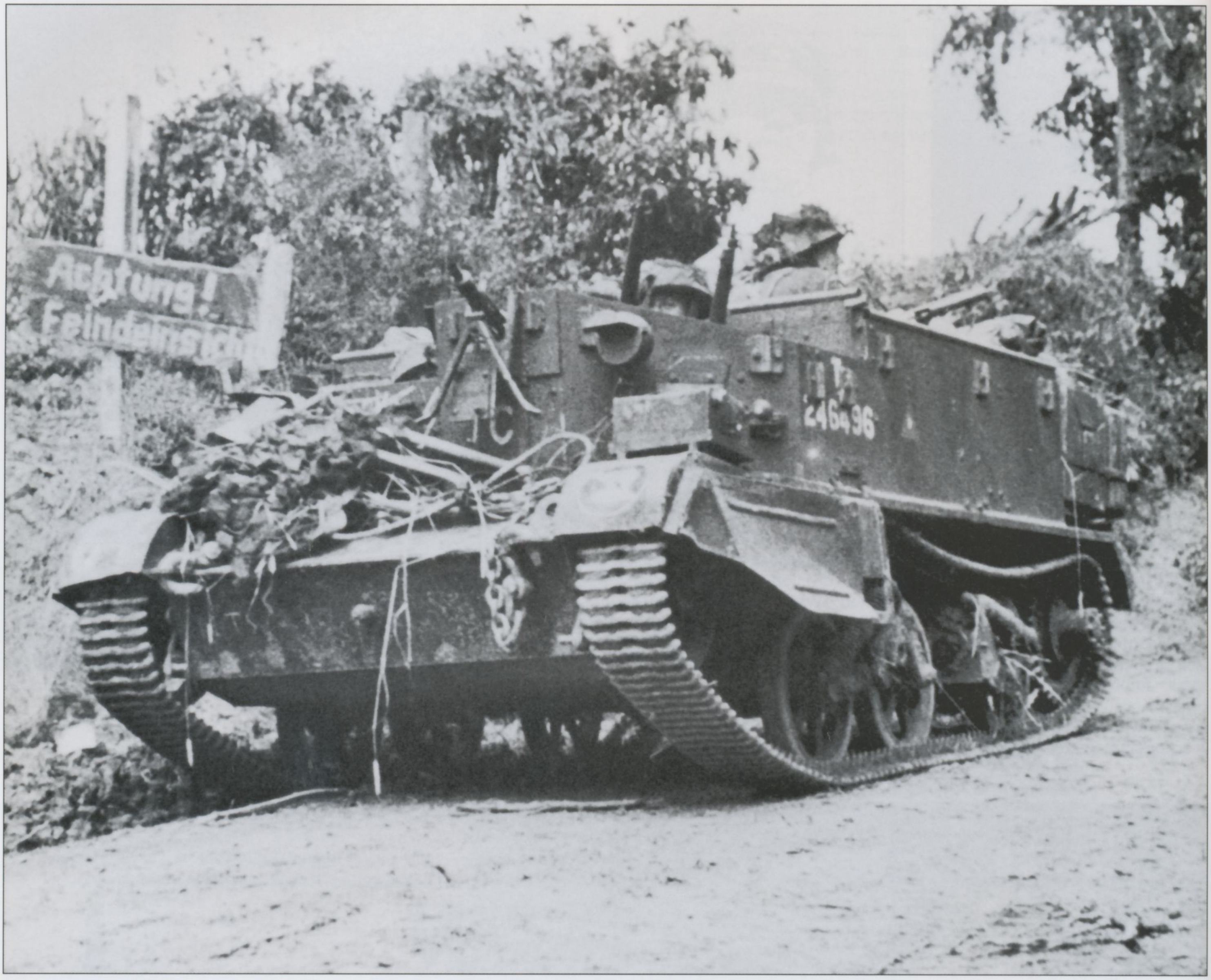
SS-Sturmbannführer Gerd Bremer, commander of SS-Panzer-Aufklärungs-Abteilung 12, received his Knights Cross on 30 October 1941 as commander of a motorcycle company with SS-Division Leibstandarte-SS 'Adolf Hitler'. On 7 June, they were occupying positions on the left flank of the division in and around Audrieu. While tanks from the Sherwood Rangers Yeomanry probed the German defenses, British ground and naval artillery laid a barrage on Audrieu that caused a great number of casualties on the defenders, including Bremer who was wounded in the shoulder.



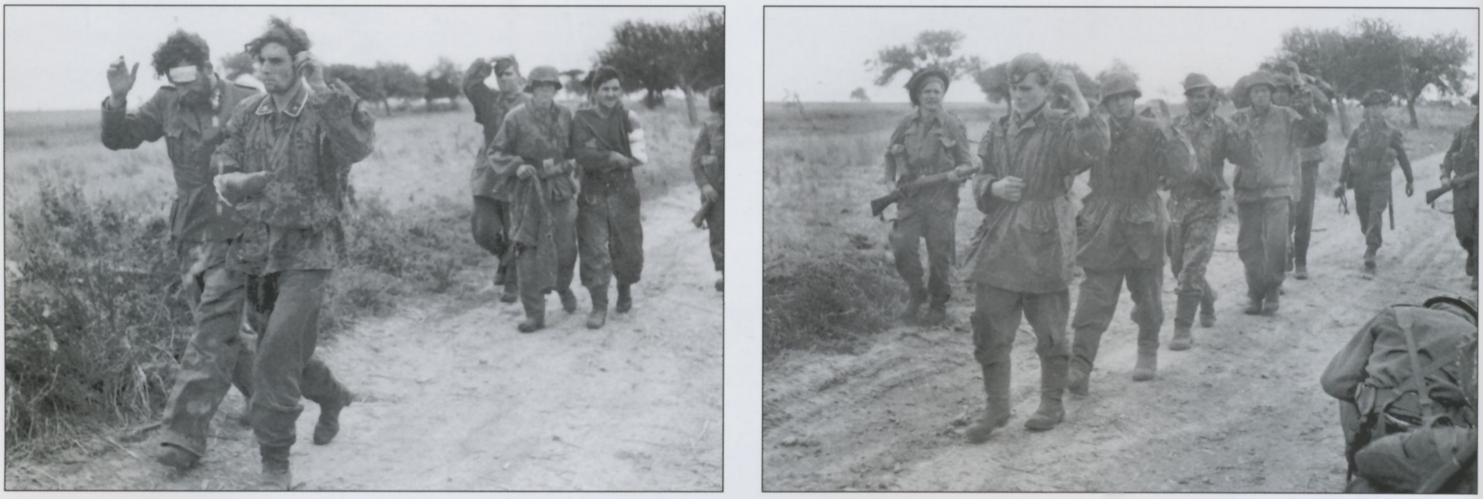
The cost of war. A young SS-Panzer-Grenadier lies dead beside an abandoned 7.5cm PaK40 anti-tank gun at Fontenay-le-Pesnil in late June 1944. In the background, partially hidden by the trees at the left and facing away, is a burned out M4 composite hull Sherman that was probably knocked out by the Panther Ausf.G from 1./SS-Panzer-Regiment 12, itself destroyed, on the right. On 26 June, Sherman tanks from the Sherwood Rangers Yeomanry advanced past Fontenay-le-Pesnil and were in Cheux by noon.



A Pz.Kpfw.IV Ausf.H from 8./SS-Panzer-Regiment 12 is towed away by a Centaur ARV from the British 11th Armoured Division after being captured near Cheux. This Panzer IV, with the tactical number '837', was commanded by SS-Untersturmführer Jeran and took part in the successful action at le Menil-Patry on 11 June where 37 Sherman tanks from the 6th Armoured Regiment (First Hussars) were knocked out. Note the neatly applied tactical number in red with a white outline and the divisional emblem painted on the upper right rear hull plate.

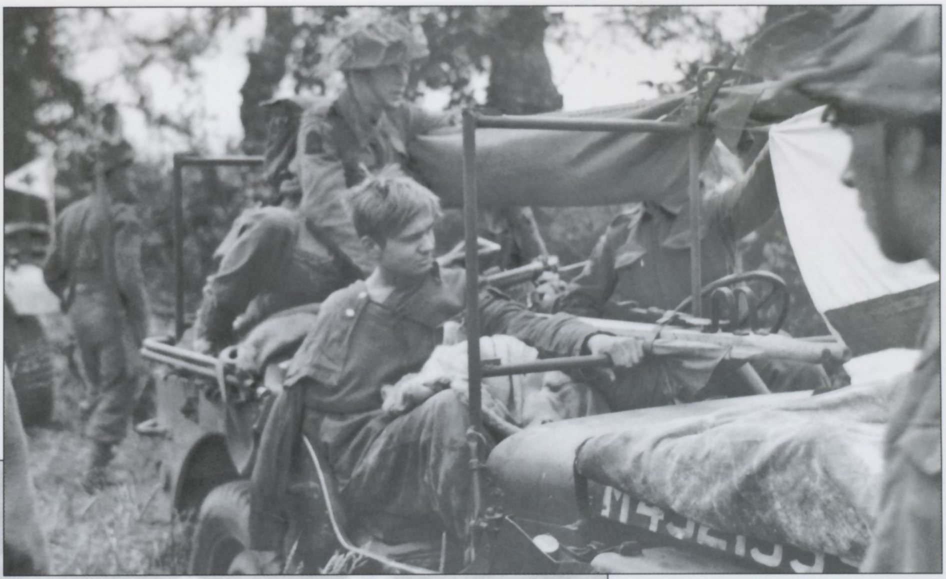


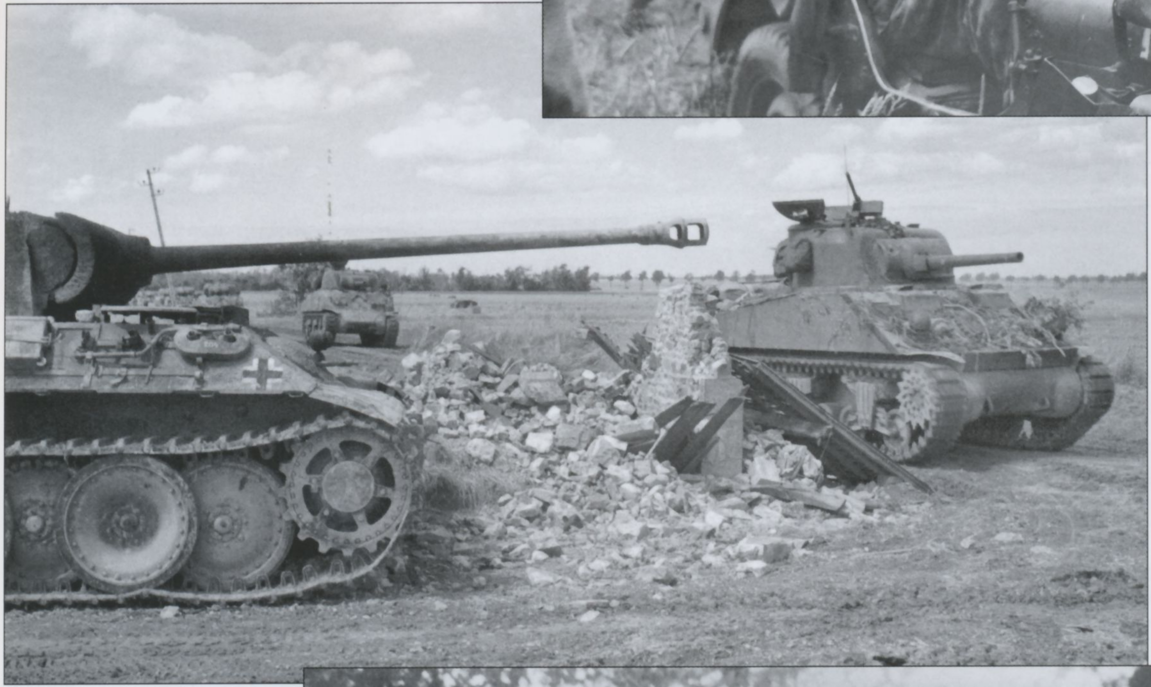
A British Universal Carrier driving in the Cheux area in late June 1944. Note the captured MG42 projecting from the driver's compartment. The formation badge of the 49th (West Riding) Infantry Division, a white polar bear standing on an ice floe, is painted on the left trackguard of the carrier. The Arm of Service number, '64' is painted in white on a black square on the right trackguard. The sign in the background, 'Achtung! Feindeinsicht' warns the enemy can observe your movements.



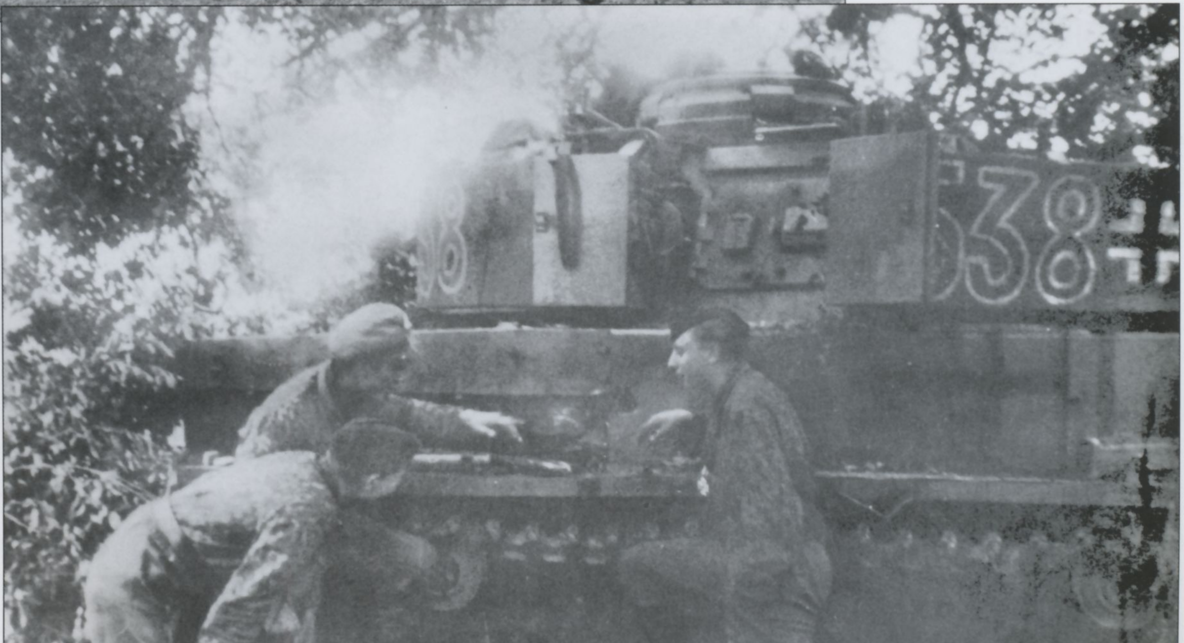
Soldiers from the British 15th (Scottish) Infantry Division march away prisoners from 12.SS-Panzer-Division 'Hitlerjugend' captured near Cheux during Operation 'Epsom' on 26 June 1944. There is a mixture of different uniforms being worn by the prisoners. The SS-Obersturmführer on the left is wearing his field-gray tunic with Italian camouflage cloth trousers while the SS-Unterscharführer walking beside him is wearing a Model 1940 'Oak Leaf' pattern camouflage smock over his field-gray uniform as is the grenadier following on the left. The grenadier with the arm wound is wearing the M44 'Dot' pattern camouflage drill uniform, the tunic of which is being carried by his comrade. In the right photo, combinations of camouflage smocks, field-gray and M44 'Dot' pattern camouflage drill uniforms can be seen.

This fortunate young SS-trooper is having his wound attended to in a British field hospital. Just visible on the sleeve of the British soldier to the left is the Infantry Formation Badge of the 59th (Staffordshire) Infantry Division.

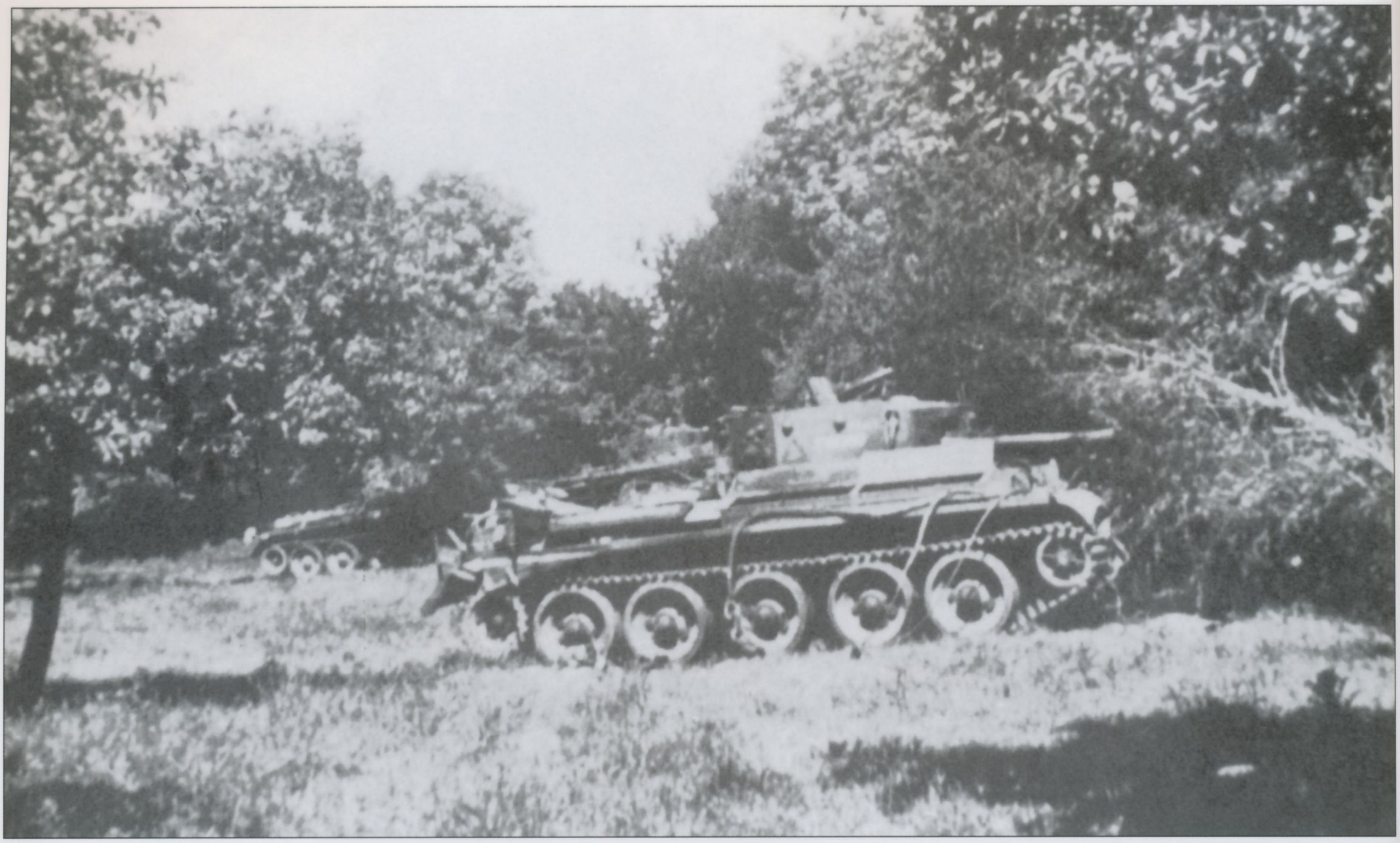




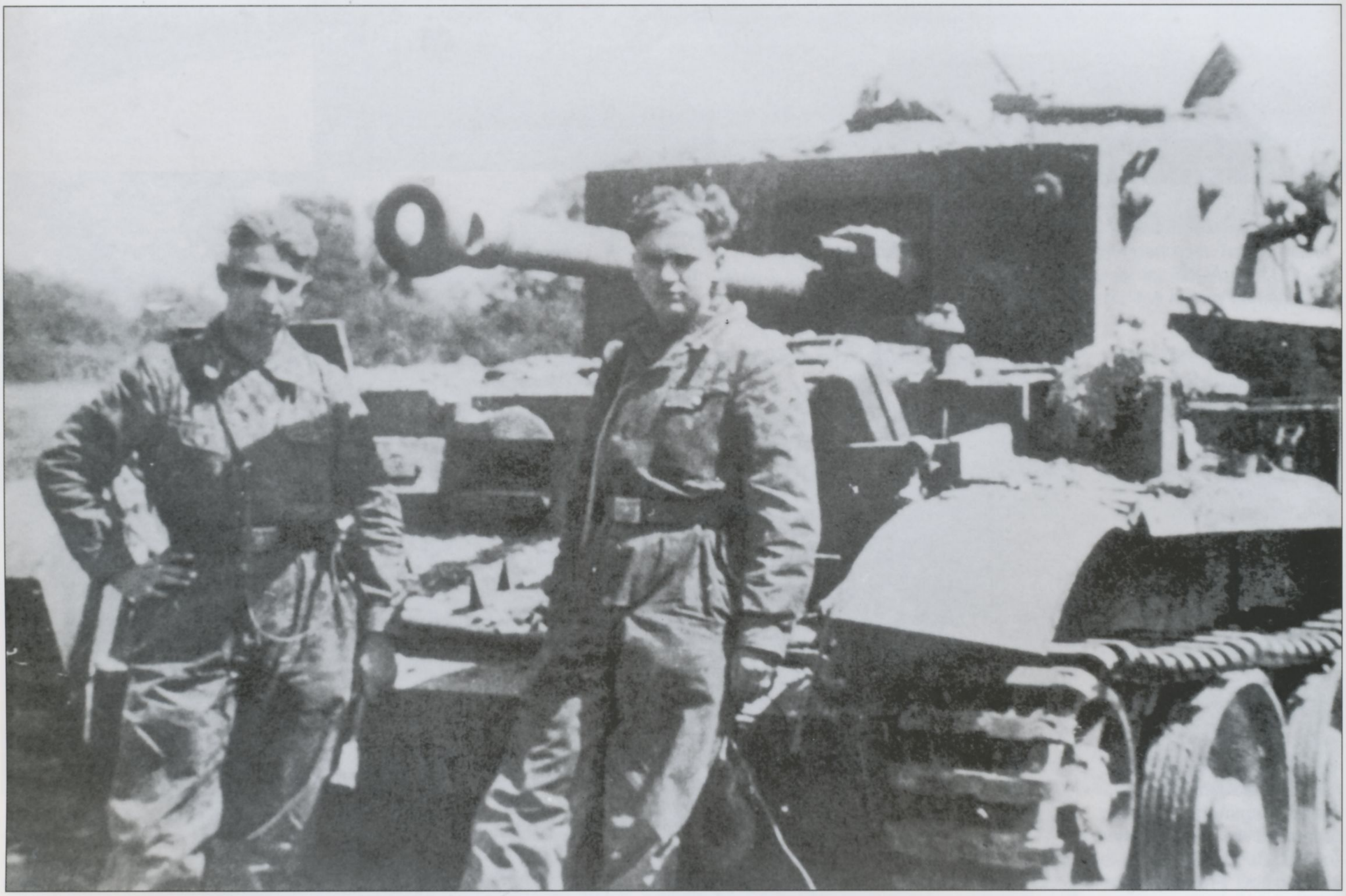
Panther '204' with a column of Sherman tanks passing by heading in the direction of Evrecy from Tilley sur Seulles. Note the tactical number painted on the 'C' tow hook carried on the side of the hull.



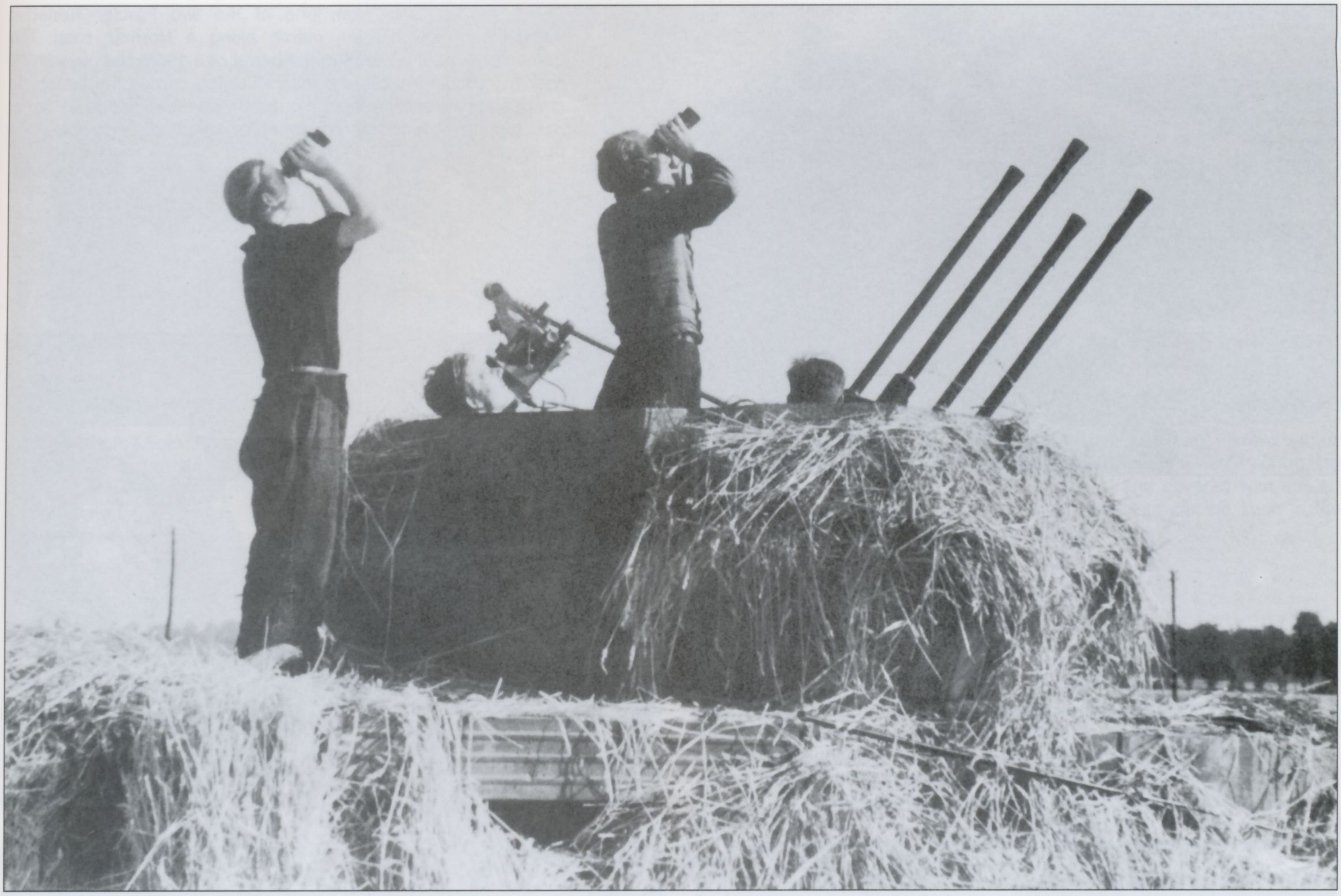
SS-Unterscharführer Willy Kretschmar and SS-Sturmmanner Schweinfest and Stefan inspect the damage to Pz.Kpfw.IV Ausf.H, tactical number '538', sustained during the attack on Hill 112. After renewing the attack on Hill 112 on 29 June, II./SS-Panzer-Regiment 12 supported by the newly arrived 10.SS-Panzer-Division 'Frundsberg', recaptured the hill by mid-day on 30 June.



A pair of British Cromwell tanks knocked out while attacking Hill 112 in late June 1944.



Two young tankers from SS-Panzer-Regiment 12 pose in front of a burned out Cromwell. Both men are wearing the one-piece camouflage combination coverall in a 'Plane Tree' pattern.



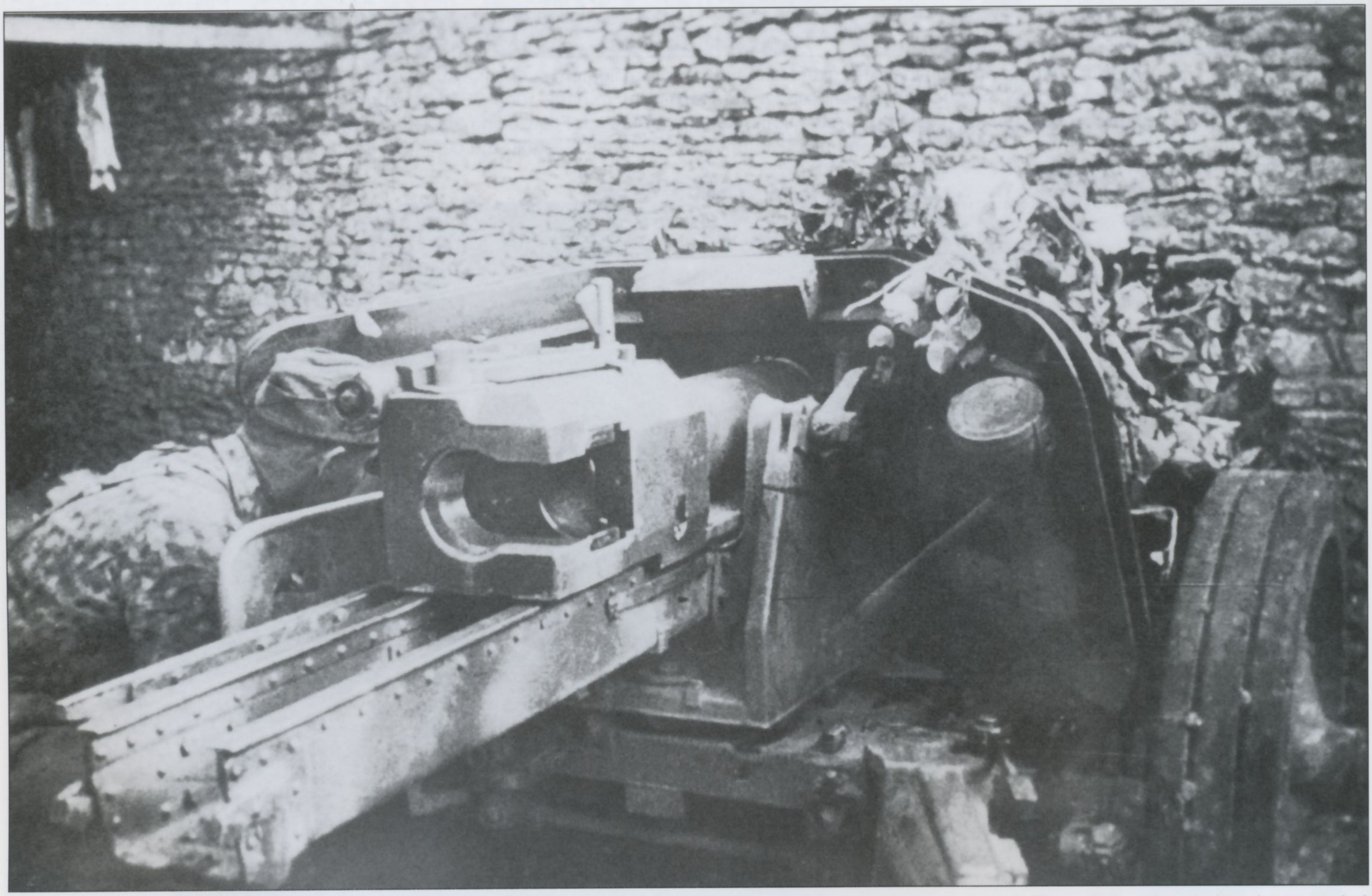
The crew of a Flakpanzer IV 'Wirbelwind' scan the skies over Normandy for Allied fighters during the summer of 1944. Coincidental to the German Army's development of mobile anti-aircraft guns mounted on the chassis of the Pz.Kpfw.IV, in early 1944 SS-Untersturmführer Karl Wilhelm Krause from II./SS-Panzer-Regiment 12 ordered the maintenance company to mount as many as three 2cm Flakvierling 38 anti-aircraft guns on Panzer IV chassis. This was accomplished by removing the turret of the Pz.Kpfw.IV and mounting the gun minus its shield in the center of the opening. This is one of the production vehicles shipped to the division in late July 1944.

Grenadiers of 12.SS-Panzer-Division 'Hitlerjugend' turn their attention to the skies as a wave of Allied bombers passes overhead to bomb Caen. With the exception of the man in the foreground wearing a greatcoat, they all are wearing the Model 1942 camouflage smock in the 'Plane Tree' pattern.

A camouflaged 7.5cm PaK40 anti-tank gun from the SS-Divisions-Begleit-Kompanie has been set up alongside a country road. The gun layer on the left keeps watch with his binoculars ready for the first sign of the enemy. He is wearing the Model 1940 camouflage smock without foliage loops on which he has turned up the long skirt, probably to prevent snagging on the gun. The man on the right has the later Model 1942 smock.

A mortar team from one of the two Panzer-Grenadier battalions of the division march along a Norman road. The grenadier in front is carrying the barrel of a 10cm Nebelwerfer 35 over his shoulder while the man following carries the baseplate strapped to his back. Although originally intended to use smoke or gas bombs, it was more commonly used for high explosive projectiles.

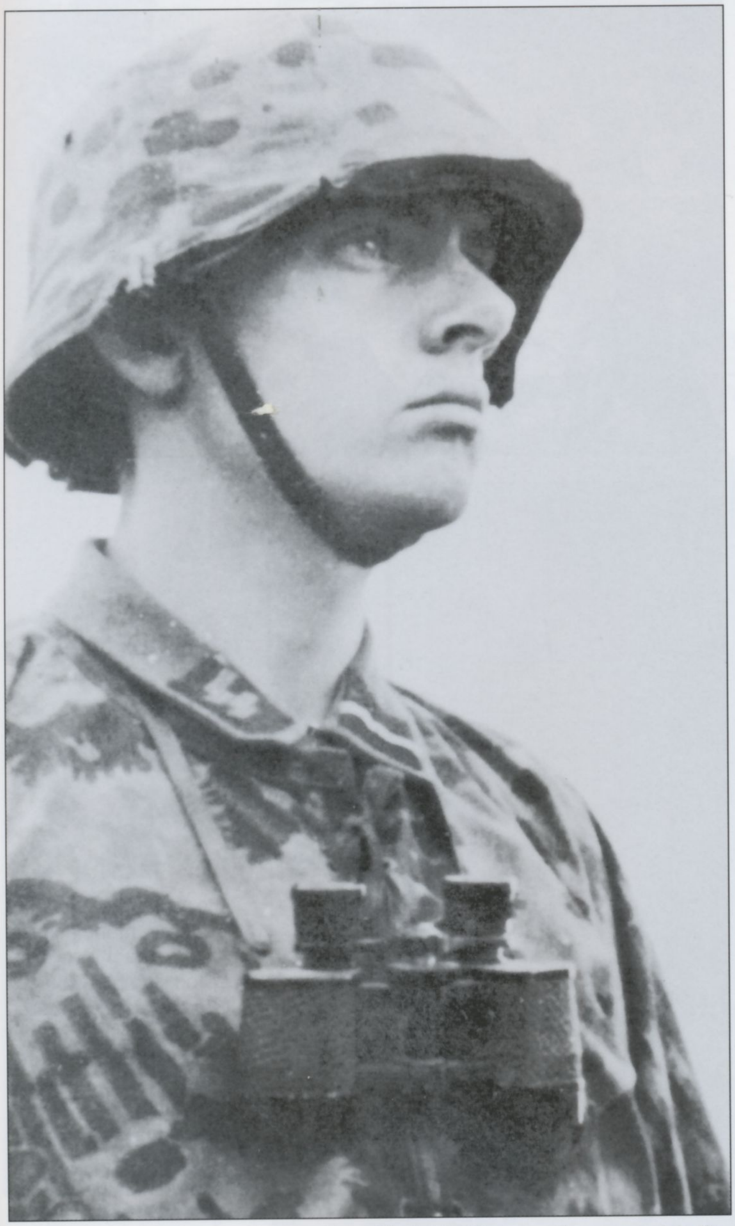
Two radio operators in the command post of an artillery battery, relay instructions between troops on the front line and the gun crews by radio and a Fernsprecher 33 field telephone. The man on the telephone is wearing a Model 1940 camouflage smock in an 'Oak Leaf' pattern with the 'Dot' pattern trousers from his M1944 two-piece camouflage drill uniform.



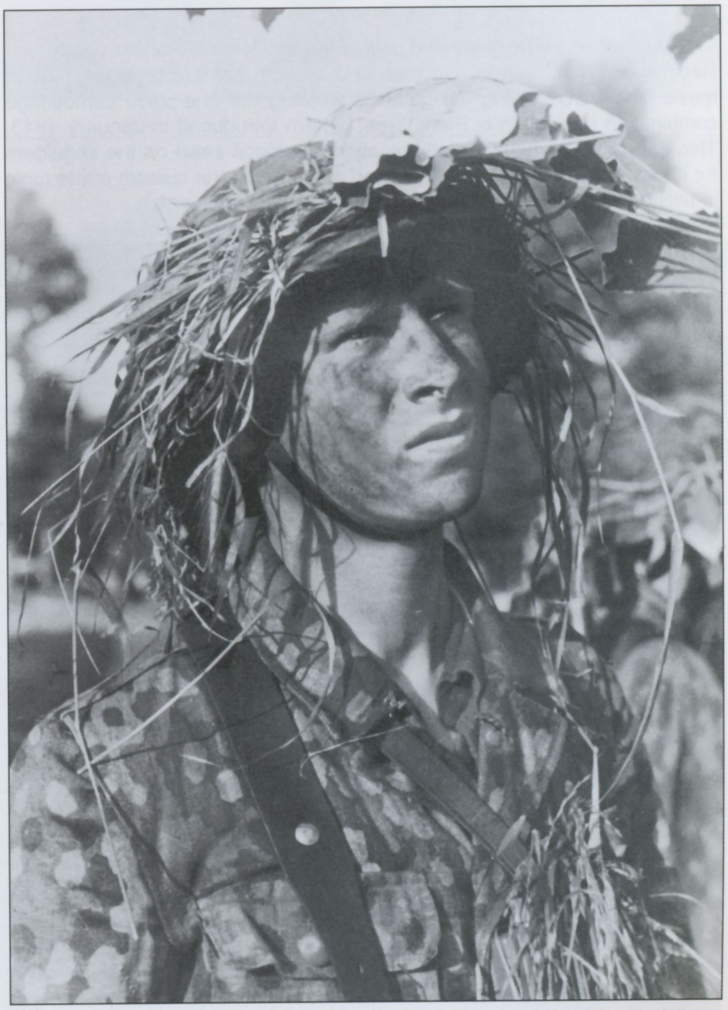
The gun layer of a 7.5cm PaK40 anti-tank gun from the SS-Divisions-Begleit-Kompanie sights in his weapon. The gun has been cleverly concealed behind a stone wall that has had a hole knocked out for the barrel and the shield covered with foliage. In a location such as this, the crew could rely on getting off a few rounds before their position would be discovered, forcing them to move.

Another 7.5cm PaK40 anti-tank gun from the SS-Divisions-Begleit-Kompanie in action north of Caen in July 1944. The gun commander on the left keeps watch for enemy vehicles while the gun layer and gun loader concentrate on their jobs. Their gun is also well concealed behind a breach in a stone wall giving a commanding field of fire across the open field.

Two grenadiers from I./SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 25 take a meal break north of Caen in July 1944. Their elaborate dugout has a corrugated sheet metal roof reinforced with wood framing and covered with soil for protection. Two loaves of bread and their mess kits can be seen in the foreground along with a telephone cable reel.



This SS-Sturmmann is wearing a Model 1940 camouflage smock in the 'Palm' pattern with a 'Plane Tree' pattern helmet cover. One of the identifying features of the Model 1940 smock is the plain neck instead of the elasticized neck that was used on the Model 1938 smock.



A young SS-Panzer-Grenadier, his face blackened and with foliage stuffed around his helmet, waits for the coming battle. This photo provides an excellent close-up view of the M44 camouflage drill uniform 'Dot' pattern.

SS-Sturmbannführer Hans Waldmüller (right), commander of I.Bataillon, SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 25, discusses the situation with one of his officers in a field south of Cambes in early July 1944, as SS-Kreigsberichter Wolfgang Pahl looks on. After holding the right flank of the division against British attacks for four weeks, the battalion reluctantly withdrew through Caen to set up new defensive positions along the south bank of the Orne River. Waldmüller was awarded the Knights Cross on 27 August, 1944 and was killed shortly after by Belgian partisans on 8 September, 1944.

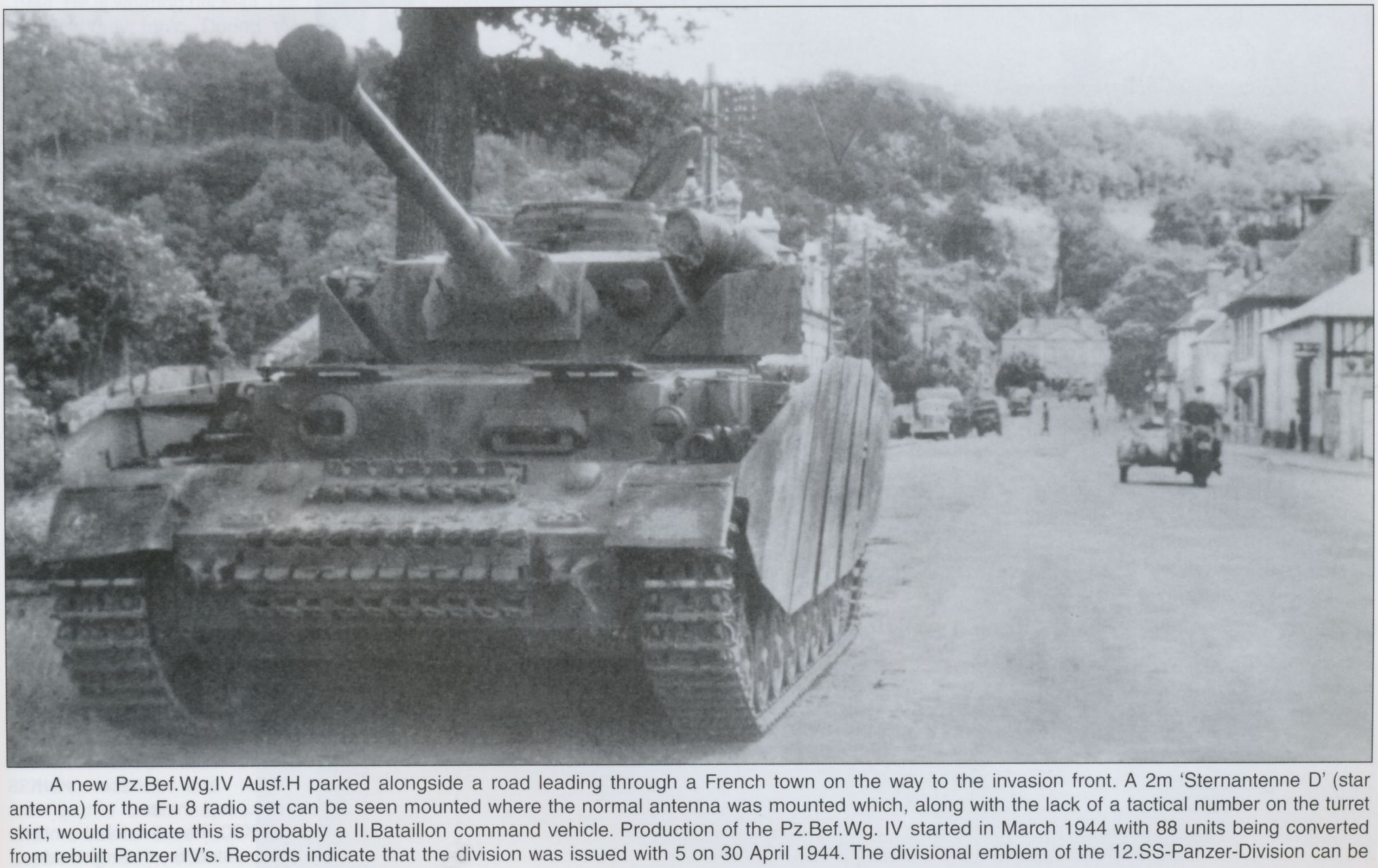
SS-Untersturmführer Willi Klein, Waldmüller's adjutant, points to the enemy positions on a map from the relative safety of a trench south of Cambes. He is wearing the Model 1942 camouflage smock with foliage loops and green on black rank patch sewn to the sleeve.

Meanwhile, in the command post of III.Bataillon, SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 25 near Buron, the men find a calm moment to enjoy a bit of music. The NCO playing the guitar is wearing the one-piece camouflage combination coverall in a 'Plane Tree' pattern introduced in January 1943. This early style camouflage combination has loops sewn on the shoulders for shoulder straps. The two other men are wearing the custom made tunic in Italian camouflage cloth with the green on black rank patch.

SS-Grenadiers fire a Czech manufactured ZB26 machine gun, called the MG26(t) in German service. It fired a 7.92mm round and had a firing rate of 500-550 rounds per minute. The grenadier in the foreground has another 30 round magazine in his hand ready to feed into the weapon. He is wearing the Model 1940 camouflage smock in the 'Plane Tree' pattern.

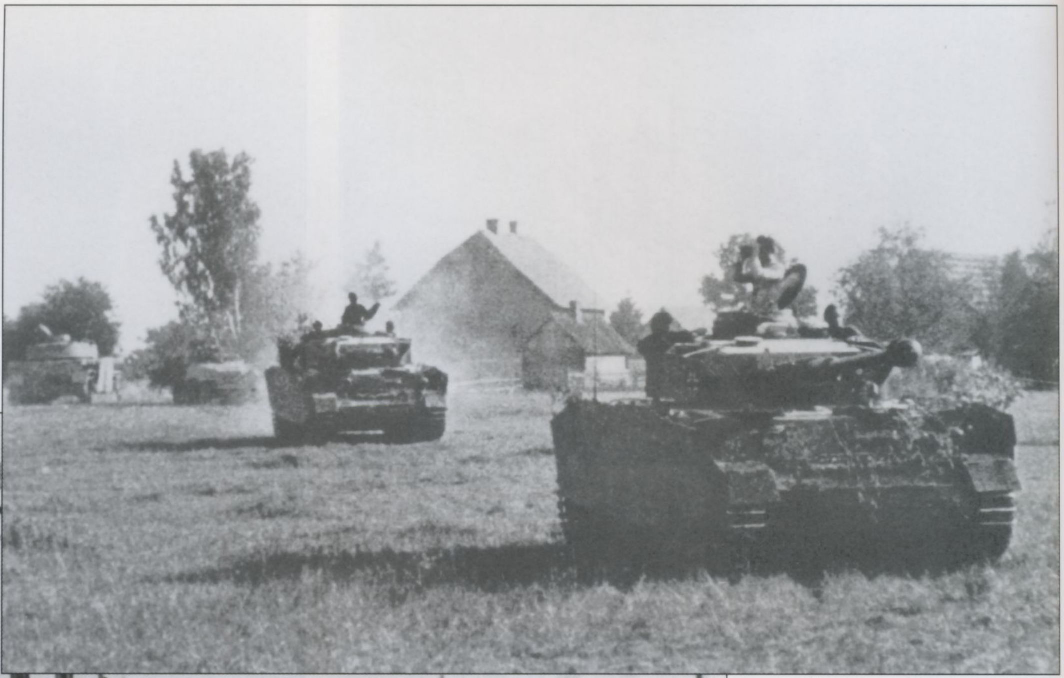
Complete exhaustion has overcome these two motorcycle dispatch riders as they catch some much-needed rest, never far from their machines. The motorcycle is an Italian Moto-Guzzi with a sidecar.

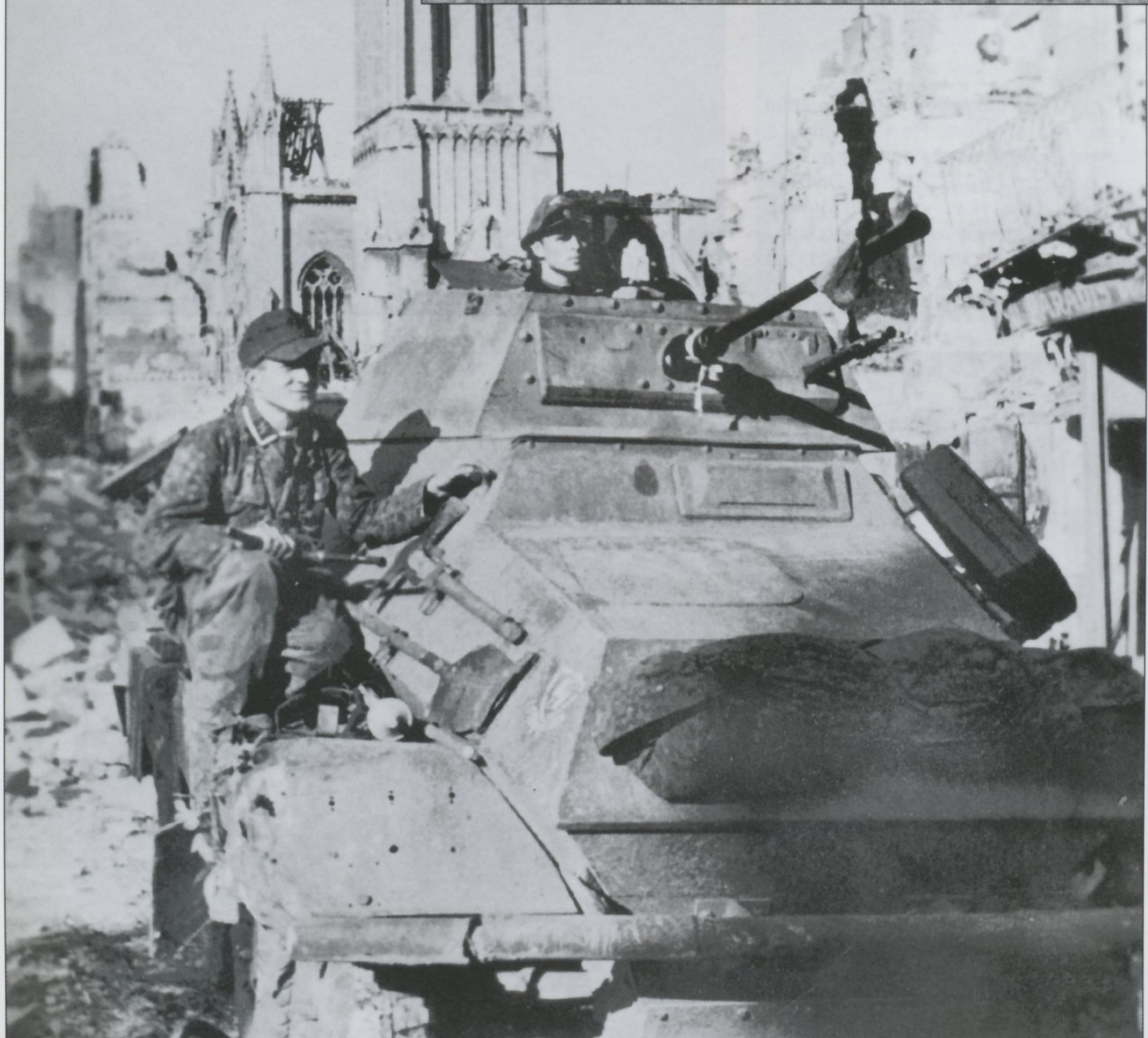
SS-Kriegsberichter Wilfried Woscidlo took this photo of a youthful machine gunner carrying an MG42 over his shoulder. He is wearing a Wehrmacht splinter pattern hooded camouflage smock and matching helmet cover and likely does not belong to 12.SS-Panzer-Division 'Hitlerjugend' at all. During the heat of battle, it was not uncommon for men separated from their units to join up with other friendly forces for the short term. Inspired by the success of the Waffen-SS camouflage smocks, the Wehrmacht design differed in that it was white on the reverse side and intended to be also worn as a winter garment.



A new Pz.Bef.Wg.IV Ausf.H parked alongside a road leading through a French town on the way to the invasion front. A 2m 'Sternantenne D' (star antenna) for the Fu 8 radio set can be seen mounted where the normal antenna was mounted which, along with the lack of a tactical number on the turret skirt, would indicate this is probably a II.Bataillon command vehicle. Production of the Pz.Bef.Wg. IV started in March 1944 with 88 units being converted from rebuilt Panzer IV's. Records indicate that the division was issued with 5 on 30 April 1944. The divisional emblem of the 12.SS-Panzer-Division can be seen painted in white on the right mudguard.

Two Pz.Kpfw.IV Ausf.H roll across an open field followed by an Sd.Kfz.251 Ausf.C. The vehicle on the right is also a Pz.Bef.Wg.IV but with the star antenna, barely visible on the original photograph, mounted to a special armored housing welded on the upper right rear of the hull. Another Pz.Kpfw.IV can be seen parked in the background.





A late model Schwerer Panzerspähwagen (Sd.Kfz.231) 8-Rad from SS-Panzer-Aufklärungs-Abteilung 12 moving through the demolished city of Caen in July 1944. The NCO riding on the mudguard is wearing an M1944 camouflage drill tunic in the 'Dot' pattern over his field-gray tunic, the collar of which is facing out, along with trousers made from Italian army camouflage cloth. A Panzerfaust 30 kleine can be seen beside his left leg. In July 1942, the shape of the hull was modified to simplify production and the nose plate, turret front and mantlet increased to 30mm thick and a 2cm KwK38 mounted instead of the 2cm KwK30. The divisional emblem is painted on the right side of the nose.

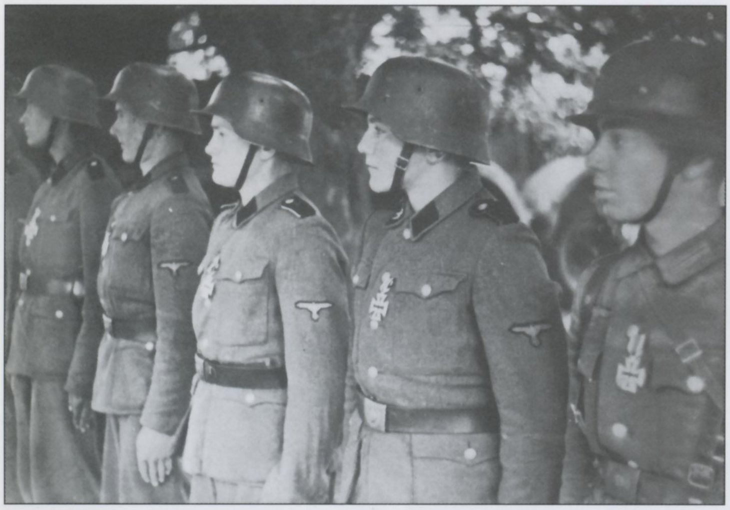
This wounded SS-Panzer-Grenadier was captured in Caen in early July 1944. He is wearing his M44 'Dot' pattern camouflage drill uniform tunic over his field-gray tunic. During the battle for Caen, 12.SS-Panzer-Division 'Hitlerjugend' lost over 600 men and a substantial amount of equipment.

Two grenadiers run through the bombed out ruins of Caen in July 1944. On the night of 7 July, R.A.F. bombers dropped over 2,500 tons of bombs on the northern outskirts of Caen in preparation for Operation 'Charnwood', the assault on Caen by the British I Corps. On the night of 8 July, the division began to pull out of Caen to form a new defensive line on the south bank of the Orne.

A heavily armed group of grenadiers negotiate the rubble-strewn streets of Caen in a Schwimmwagen in July 1944. On 11 July, 12-SS-Panzer-Division 'Hitlerjugend' turned over their positions in the Caen sector to 1.SS-Panzer-Division 'Leibstandarte Adolf Hitler' and went into reserve in the Falaise area. The brief respite gave the men a chance to rest and perform much needed maintenance on their battered vehicles but during that time, they did not receive replacements in either men or equipment.

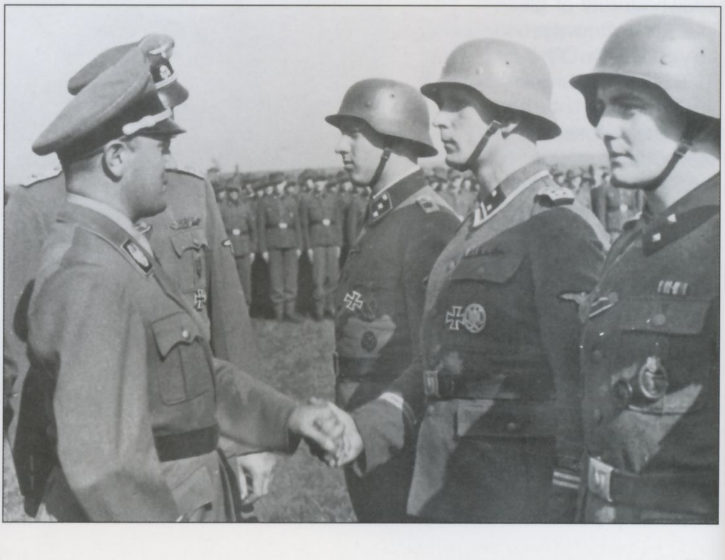
SS-Panzer-Grenadiers of 12.SS-Panzer-Division 'Hitlerjugend' taken prisoner by American forces in the Falaise Pocket. In late July, the U.S. First Army had finally broken through the German defenses around St.Lô. Patton's new Third Army raced south into Brittany then east to meet the British and Canadians advancing toward Falaise. On 19 August they met at Chambois trapping the remains of 19 German divisions. From 7 June to 22 August, 'Hitlerjugend' had lost approximately 8,000 killed, wounded or missing.

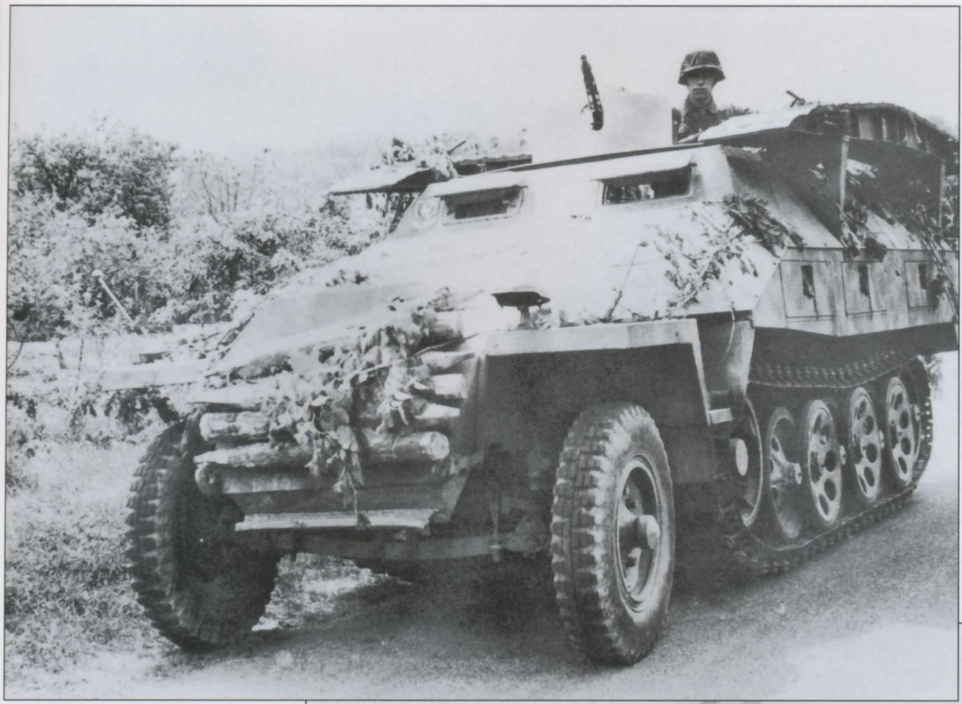
After escaping from the Falaise Pocket, SS-Brigadeführer Kurt Meyer was captured by Belgian partisans in the village of Durnal, 15km south of Namur and turned over to the British. He was wearing the uniform of an army Oberst at the time. On 9 November 1944, SS-Obersturmbannführer Hugo Kraas, a regimental commander with 1.SS-Panzer-Division Leibstandarte-SS 'Adolf Hitler', was promoted to SS-Standartenführer and took over command of the division, a post he held until the end of the war.



Panzer-Grenadiers of 12.SS-Panzer-Division 'Hitlerjugend' are decorated with the Iron Cross Second Class in late July 1943 for their valor during the fighting at Normandy. Included among the recipients is a young Wehrmacht infantryman on the right. All are wearing the M1943 field-gray tunic with plain pockets and field-gray collar. Note that none of the grenadiers wear the 'Hitlerjugend' cuffband on their uniform as the division was not authorized to wear one until September 1944.

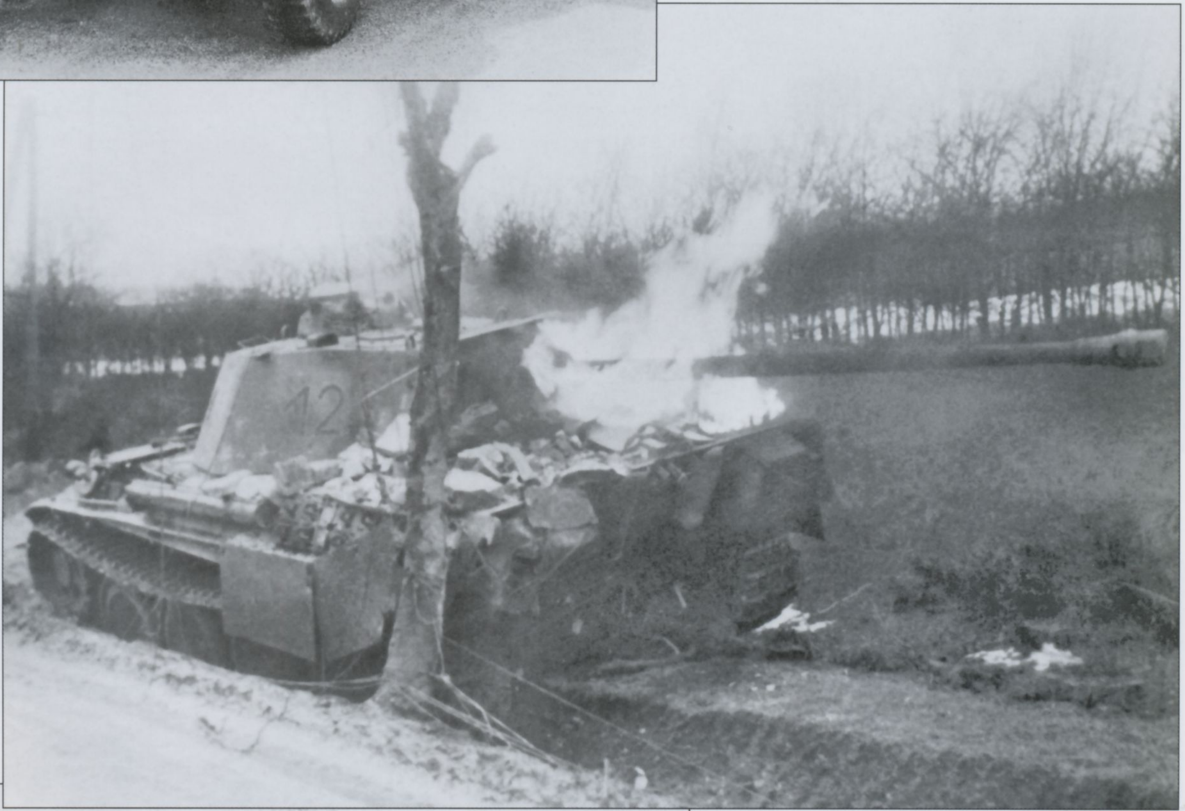
In a formal ceremony held at Kaiserslautern on 19 September 1944, Reichsjugendführer Artur Axmann presented the men of the division with the 'Hitlerjugend' cuffband. A number of the more highly decorated officers and NCO's were singled out to receive theirs personally. First in line on the left, this SS-Untersturmführer wears the Iron Cross First Class with the Second Class ribbon sewn into his buttonhole, Black Wound Badge (for one or two wounds) and a special version bronze colored Infantry Assault Badge awarded to motorized infantry. The SS-Hauptscharführer in the center wears the Iron Cross First Class and General Assault Badge. A former 'LSSAH' member, he wears the 'Adolf Hitler' cuffband written in Sütterlin script and two silver braids on each sleeve indicating he has been appointed as 'Speiss', the equivalent of Company Sergeant Major. The SS-Oberscharführer on the right wears the Panzer Assault Badge, Black Wound Badge and ribbon of the Iron Cross Second Class.

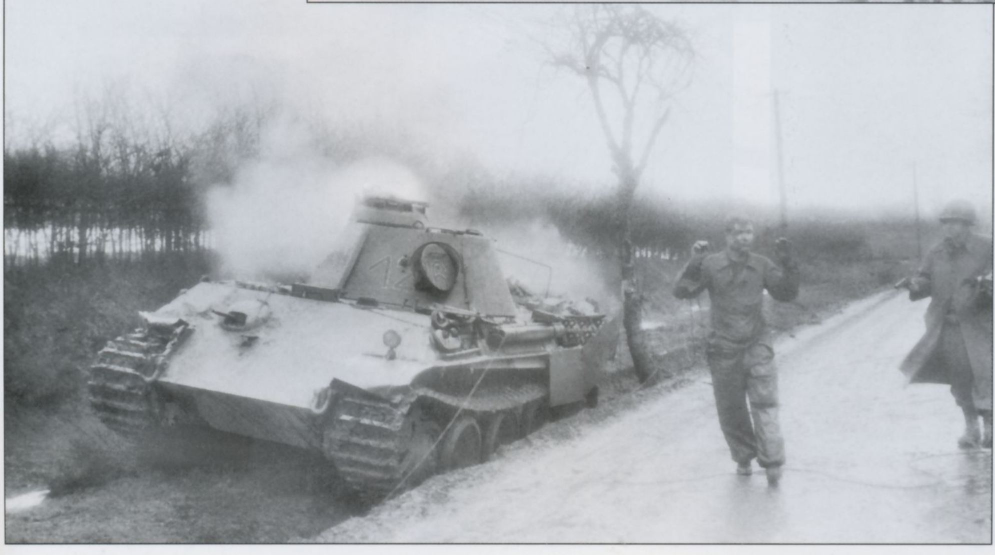




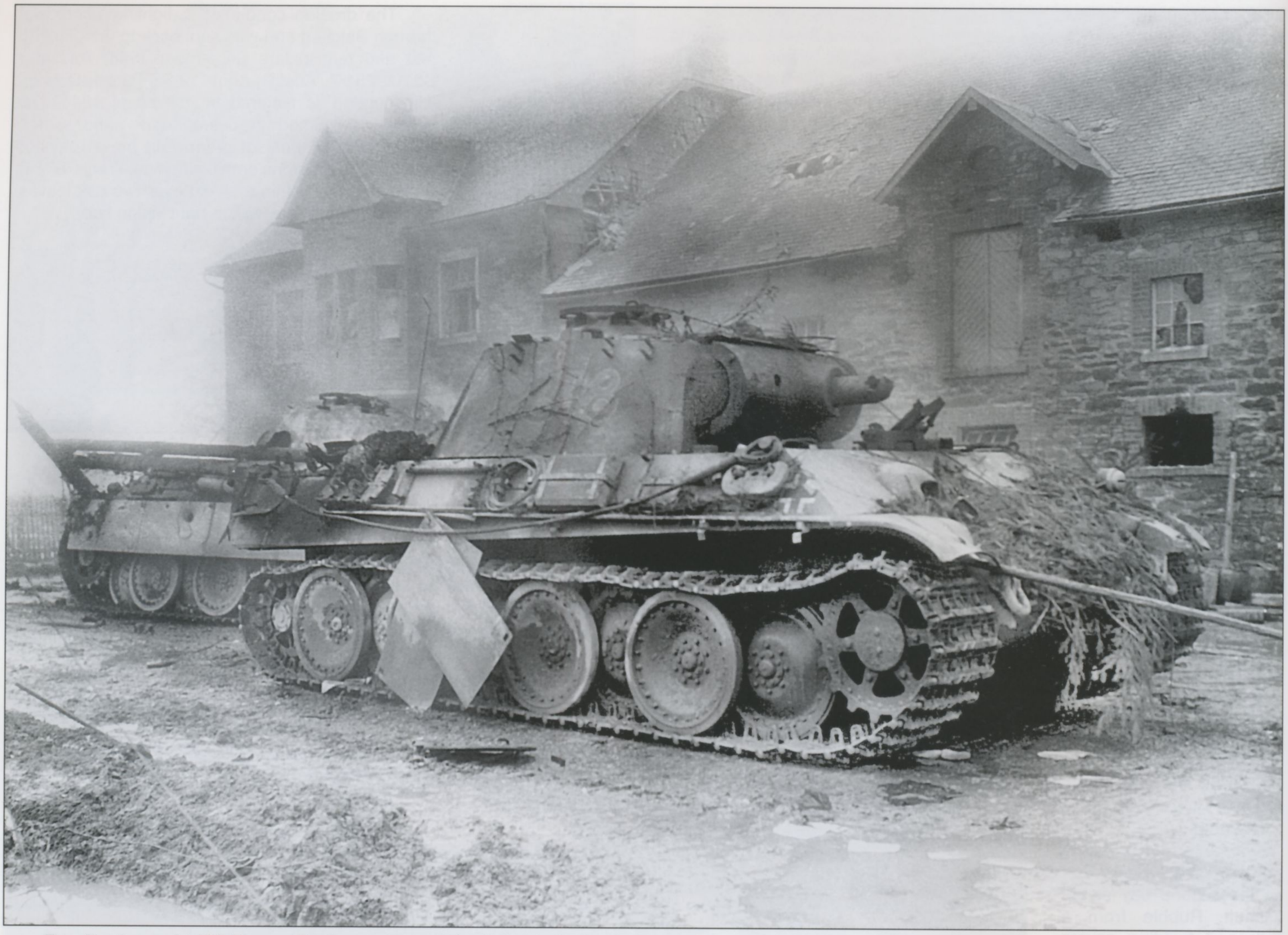
The division conducted a fighting withdrawal through Belgium and was sent back to Germany to rest and refit in late September 1944. This new Sd.Kfz.251/7 Ausf.D from 12.SS-Panzer-Division 'Hitlerjugend' is pictured in the fall of 1944. The vehicle is painted in overall dark sand with a camouflage scheme of green and brown patches and has the divisions emblem, a single runic 'S' with a skeleton key within a shield over two oak leaves, painted in white beside the right vision flap.

In December 1944, 12.SS-Panzer-Division 'Hitlerjugend' was transferred to VI.Panzer-Armee commanded by SS-Oberstgruppenführer Sepp Dietrich to take part in the Ardennes Offensive. Here, a Panther Ausf.G from 1.Kompanie burns along the road south of Krinkelt on the second day of the assault. Rubble from a collapsed building covers the engine deck indicating they have already seen some action in the town. It is painted with a base coat of red primer with green and dark sand patches. The tactical number '126' is painted on the sides and back of the turret with what are most likely, red numbers outlined in white.

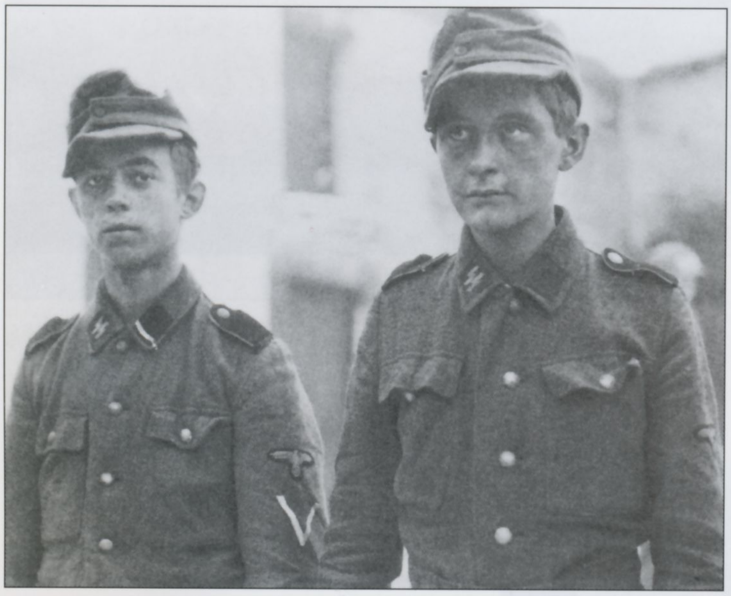




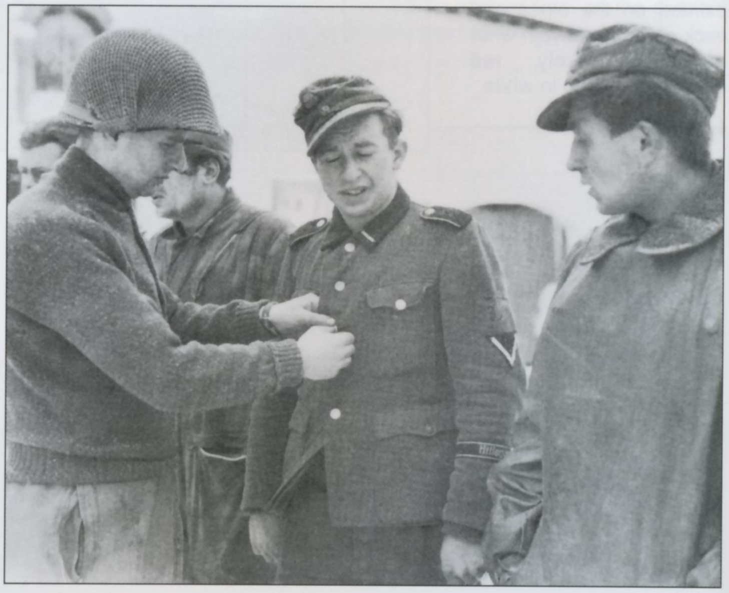
Another photo of Panther '126' from 12.SS-Panzer-Division near Krinkelt, clearly showing the tactical number on the rear of the turret. The G.I. on the right is reportedly from the photo unit that took the pictures and the photo has possibly been staged.



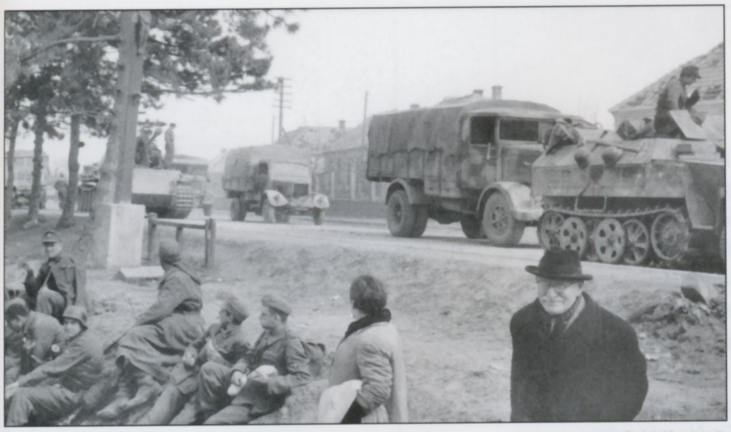
Two Panthers of I./SS-Panzer-Regiment 12 smolder in Krinkelt after being knocked out on 18 December. The Panther in the foreground, with tactical number '318', has had its gun barrel blown off in the vicious fighting that took place there against the U.S. 99th Infantry Division, reinforced by the 2nd Infantry Division. Attacking in an early morning fog, the Panthers were easy prey for bazooka teams who were able to close in without being spotted.



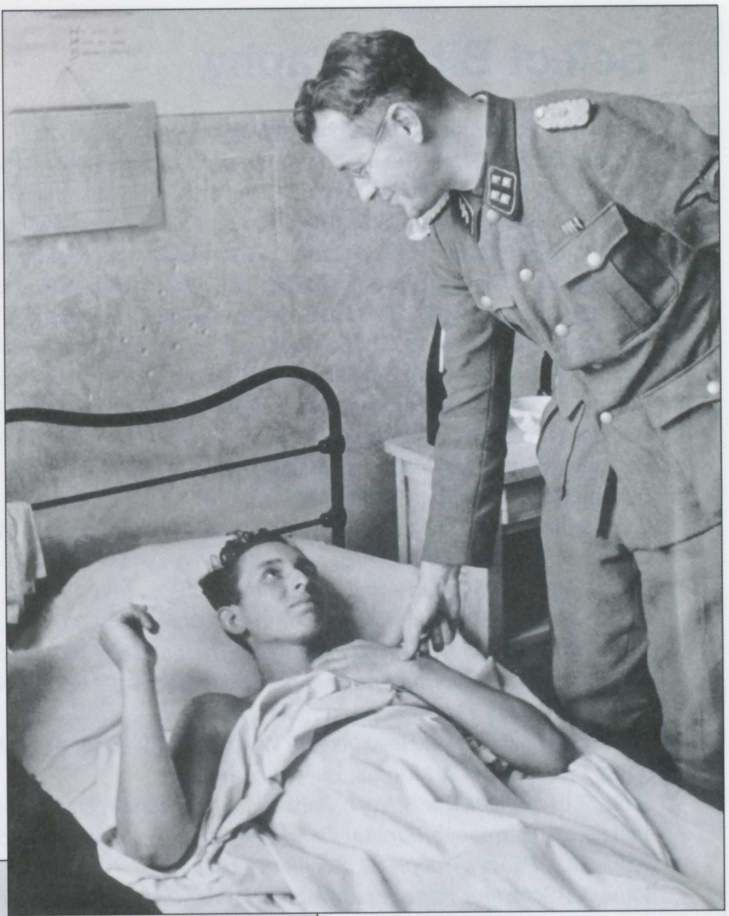
Two young SS-Panzer-Grenadiers captured by the U.S. 6th Armored Division at Mageret in Belgium in January 1945. They are poorly dressed for the harsh winter weather experienced in late December and early January. After a failed attempt to take Dom Bütgenbach on 22 December, 12.SS-Panzer-Division 'Hitlerjugend' was withdrawn to reassemble near Möderscheid the next day. They were then transferred south to the Bastogne area before being forced to withdraw back into Germany. At the end of January, they were transferred by rail to western Hungary.



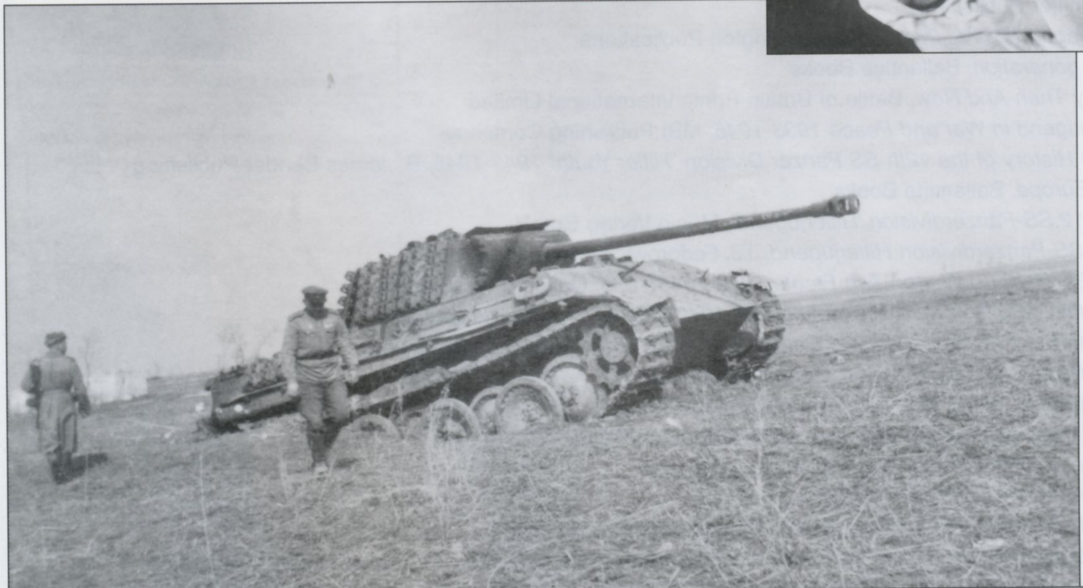
An SS-Sturmmann captured by the U.S. 6th Armored Division near Bastogne on 7 January 1945. He is wearing the M1943 field-gray uniform and for the first time we see the 'Hitlerjugend' cuffband in use. The soldier on the right is wearing the rubberized motorcycle coat.



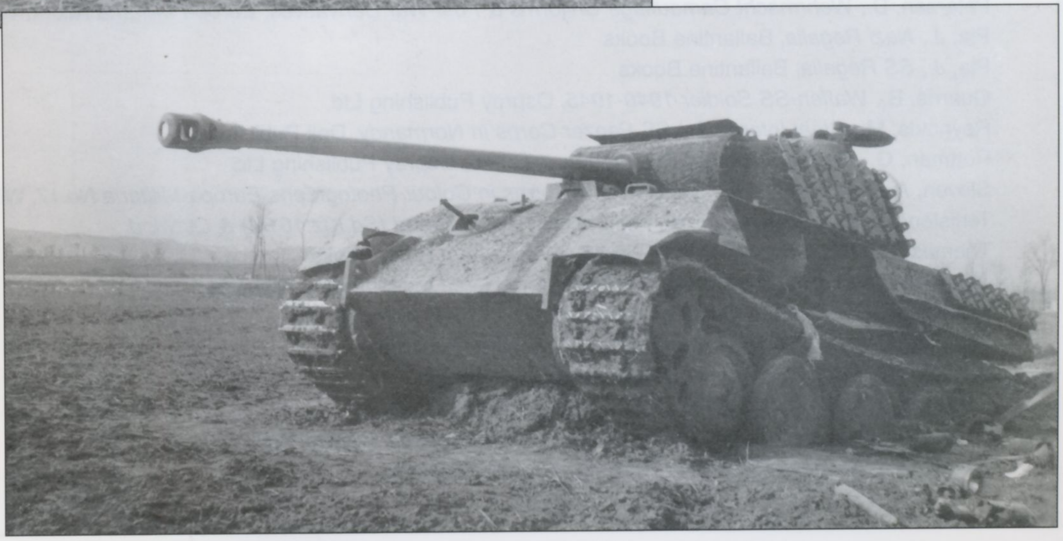
A column of transport trucks pass a Panther Ausf.G and an Sd.Kfz.250 'Neue' in a Hungarian town in March 1945 on their way to Lake Balaton, known as the Plattensee to the Germans. To help conceal the movement of 6.Panzer-Armee to the eastern front for the planned Operation 'Spring Awakening', all troops were ordered to remove their cuffbands, as evidenced in this photo and all units were given special codenames. By 10 February 1945 the division had been brought almost back up to strength with 38 Pz.Kpfw.IV, 44 Panthers, 21 Jagdpanzer IV and 165 SPW's. (M. Bayerl)



An unidentified SS-Sturmbannführer from 12.SS-Panzer-Division 'Hitlerjugend' visits a wounded comrade in a hospital during the closing days of the conflict. The ribbons above his left breast pocket appear to be for the Iron Cross on the left and the War Merit Cross, either first or second class, with swords on the right. For both men, the war will soon be over. (M. Bayerl)



Two Soviet soldiers casually walk by a knocked out early Panther Ausf.G from 1./SS-Pz.Rgt.12 near Veszprem, Hungary in March 1945. Three rows of spare track links are stowed on the side of the turret on which the last digit of the tactical number, a white '2' can be seen. On 16 March, the Soviet Fourth and Ninth Guards Armies launched an attack against the IV.SS-Panzer-Korps in the Székesfehérvar sector with the objective of capturing Györ in the north and Veszprem in the south. As the situation grew more critical, I.SS-Panzer-Korps was ordered south to attack the Soviet flank from the Varpalota sector. This was to be their last offensive action of the war. (M. Bayerl)



A view of the same Panther Ausf.G from the opposite side revealing a large section of the side plate blown out by an internal explosion. The remnants of the factory applied Zimmerit coating can be clearly seen on the gun mantlet and glacis plate. (M. Bayerl)

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